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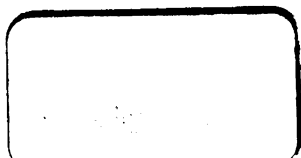


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HENRY OF GUISE;

OR,

THE STATES OF BLOIS.

BY

G. P. R. JAMES, ESQ.,

AUTHOR OF "THE GENTLEMAN OF THE OLD SCHOOL," "THE HUGUENOT," "THE GIPSY," "THE ROBBER,"
"RICHELIEU," &c.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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HENRY OF GUISE;

OR,

THE STATES OF BLOIS.

CHAPTER I.

WHEN the Abbé de Boisguerin on the following morning entered the presence of Charles of Montsoreau, his mind was prepared for everything he was to say and do, for everything he was to assert or to imply. But there was one thing for which his mind was not prepared, all shrewd, keen, politic, and experienced as it was.

There are points in the deep study of human nature which those who would use that mighty science for selfish purposes almost always overlook. Among these are the changes, both sudden and progressive, which take place in themselves and in others, and the changes in relative situations which they produce. In this respect it was that the Abbé de Boisguerin, thoughtful and calculating as he was, had not prepared himself for the meeting with Charles of Montsoreau. The time was short since they had parted. Not above six weeks had elapsed, if so much; and the abbé had come ready to deal with a youth of keen and penetrating mind, of quick perceptions and extensive powers; of all whose feelings and thoughts he fancied that he knew the scope and quality; whose mind he believed that he had gauged and tested as if it were some material substance. But he knew not at all what an effect the space of six weeks may have when spent in communication with great minds and in dealing with great events; and the moment he entered the room he saw a change which he had never dreamed of; a change which through the

mind affected the body, the countenance, and the demeanour.

Charles of Montsoreau, in short, had left him a youth high-spirited, feeling, intelligent, graceful; he stood before him a man, calm, thoughtful, grave, dignified. There were even lines of care already upon his brow, which gave it a degree of sternness not natural to it; and the whole look and aspect of his former pupil was so powerfully intellectual, that the abbé felt he must be more cautious and careful than he had prepared to be; that his words, his thoughts, and his looks would not alone be tested by old affection, nor even by the simple powers of an undoubting mind, but would be tried by experience likewise, and tried, moreover, with that degree of suspicion which is more active within us when we first learn the painful lessons taught by human deceit, than it is when we learn fully our own powers of separating truth from falsehood.

He saw that it would be necessary to be more cautious than he had proposed to be, and that, consequently, he must change much that he had intended to say and do. The very caution affected his manner, and his alteration of purposes caused occasional hesitation. Charles of Montsoreau, who remembered his whole character and demeanour during many years, found, without seeking it, a touchstone in the past by which to try the present, and the conclusion in his own heart was, "This man is not true."

The explanation given by the abbé of all that had occurred on their route did not satisfy his hearer. He told him that he had remained with Mademoiselle de Clairvaut and the carriage till the reiters had passed, and then had caused the horses to be turned into a by-road, in the hope of escaping any returning parties: they had thus accidentally met with the king's troops, whose offered protection, of course, they could not refuse. But he touched vaguely and lightly upon the mission of Colombel to the young Marquis de Montsoreau; and the Count de Logères did not press him upon the subject, for he felt sufficiently upon his guard, and had a repugnance openly to convict one whom he had loved of falseness and treachery.

He turned, then, to the note which he had received on the preceding evening.

"You tell me now," he said, "abbé, that you have

some reason to believe that Mademoiselle de Clairvaut, as I at first supposed, has seen my affection, and did not intend to discourage it. What are those reasons?"

The abbé stated vaguely that some words, dropped by Madame de Saulny, had produced that belief in his mind.

Charles of Montsoreau mused, and made no answer. The time had been when he would have replied at once, and have discussed the question fully with his former preceptor; but now he held counsel with his own heart in his own bosom, and said, "This man has some object in telling me this. Her own words were sufficiently conclusive, that she did not see, that she did not remark, the signs of affection which I had fancied undoubted."

He still maintained silence, however, towards the abbé, in regard to his own feelings. Nor could the other, though he used all his skill, draw from him the slightest indication of what he intended to do, except that he waited in Paris for the arrangement of some affairs, which were not yet concluded, with the king. He in turn, however, questioned the abbé much concerning his brother, expressing not only a wish, but a determination to see him.

"I am happy," he said, "that my letter reached him; for—by whom or for what reason instructed to falsify the truth, I do not know—the porter of Monsieur de Villequier denied the fact of your being in the house. As nothing could shake my own belief that it was Gaspar and yourself I had seen, and as both Gondrin and the page confirmed my opinion, I sent the letter at all risks: and now, good abbé, if you love Gaspar and myself as you used to do, contrive that we may meet again to-morrow, in order that all these clouds may be cleared away from between us, and that we may feel once more as brothers ought to feel towards each other."

The abbé promised to do as the young count desired, beseeching him, however, not to press his brother to an interview too suddenly, and assuring him that he would use every effort.

The still more important subject of what had become of Mademoiselle de Clairvaut remained to be discussed; and Charles of Montsoreau, though resolved to make the inquiry, approached it with distaste and with caution, from a feeling that the abbé would not deal

truly with him, and would only endeavour, in the course of any conversation upon that point, to discover what were his secret intentions, even while he concealed from him the true circumstances.

It was as he expected. The abbé told him that, in some degree under the care, and in some degree under the guard of the king's troops, the whole party had been brought to the neighbourhood of Paris, where a messenger from the monarch had conveyed to himself and the young marquis an invitation to take up their abode at the house of Villequier, while Mademoiselle de Clairvaut was conveyed to Vincennes. They had done all that was possible, he said, to prevent such a separation; but the king's commands were peremptory; and he had since learned, or, at least, had reason to believe, that the young lady had been sent in the direction of Beauvais, to the care of some distant relations.

The young count smiled and said nothing; and the abbé then, with an air of grave sincerity, proceeded to ask him what had best be done under such circumstances. He replied that he could give no advice; and many a vain effort was again made to discover what were his purposes in regard to Mademoiselle de Clairvaut. Finding that no indirect means succeeded, the abbé, trusting to their former familiarity, asked the question directly, "What do you intend to do in this business, Charles."

"Indeed, my dear abbé," replied the young count, "it is difficult to tell you. I have no definite plan of action at present, and must be guided by circumstances as they arise."

Thus ended their interview; and it formed a strange contrast to that between the abbé and Villequier, showing how simple honesty may often baffle cunning which has succeeded against astuteness like itself. The following day passed without any communication reaching the young count, either from the abbé or from his brother, from the king or the Duke of Guise; and expectation of receiving tidings from some one caused him to remain at home during the greater part of the day.

On the succeeding morning, however, he determined to proceed to the house of Villequier, and to demand peremptorily the fulfilment of the promise which the king had made. Ere he set out, however, he received a note in the hand of the Abbé de Boisguerin, informing

him briefly that his brother, having determined to return to Montsoreau, was upon the very point of setting out. He, the abbé, was to accompany him for two days' march upon the road, but would return to Paris in four or five days without fail.

Charles of Montsoreau read the note with a faint and melancholy smile, and again said, "That man is not true!"

He rode at once, however, to the hotel of Villequier, but found that the minister had once more gone to Vincennes. He inquired for the Marquis of Montsoreau of the same porter who had denied the fact of his being there. The porter, not at all discomposed, replied that the marquis and the Abbé de Boisguerin, with their train, had set out fully two hours before for Montlhéry; which, being confirmed upon farther inquiry by an Italian confectioner on the opposite side of the street, was believed by the young count, who returned home with a heart but ill at ease.

Another day was passed in gloomy and impatient expectation; but at night Gondrin reappeared from Soissons, bringing with him a brief note from the Duke of Guise:

"Your interview," it said, "was such as might be expected; your conduct all that it should have been; your view of the result right. They are endeavouring to trifle both with you and me; but we must show them that this cannot be done. I send off a courier at once to Villequier, requiring that the king's authorization shall be immediately given to you. If it reach you not before to-morrow night, I pray you set off at once with the passports you possess for Chateaufort; for I have information scarcely to be doubted that our poor Marie has been conveyed thither. Show her the letter which I gave you, requiring her to follow your directions in everything. Endeavour to bring her at once, with what people you can collect upon her lands, across the country towards Rheims, avoiding Paris. If any one stops you, or attempts either to delay your progress or dispute your passage, show them my letter of authority, as well as the passports that you already possess; and if they farther molest or delay you, they shall not be forgotten, be they great or small, when they come to reckon with your friend, Henry of Guise."

In a postscript was written at the bottom, "In going, avoid Dreux and Montfort. for the plague is raging

there. If there be any force stationed at Chateaufort to prevent the removal of Mademoiselle de Clairvaux, only ascertain distinctly the fact of her presence in the chateau, and come back to rejoin me with all speed."

The tidings brought by Gondrin showed Charles of Montsoreau that great events of some kind were in preparation. Various bodies of troops attached to the house of Lorraine were moving here and there in Champagne and the Ardennes; daily conferences were held between the Duke of Guise, the Cardinal of Bourbon, the Cardinal of Guise, and a number of other influential noblemen; the propriety of deposing the king was said to be openly discussed at Soissons, and ridicule and hatred were unsparingly busy with the names of Epernon, Villequier, and others. Couriers, totally independent of those which were sent upon the business that brought the young count to Paris, were almost hourly passing between the capital and Soissons; and it was daily whispered in the latter city, that experienced officers and small bodies of troops were daily gliding into the capital from the army which the duke had led to victory on so many previous occasions.

Early on the following morning, Charles of Montsoreau again proceeded to the Hotel de Villequier, in order that nothing might be wanting on his part. But the reply once more was, that the minister was absent; and the day passed over without any tidings from either the king or his favourite. As he passed through various parts of the city, however, the young count remarked many things that somewhat surprised him. He had hitherto ridden among the people quite unnoticed, but now many persons whom he met bowed low to him, and those seemingly of the most respectable classes of citizens. On two or three occasions the burgher guard saluted him as he passed; and in one place, where several people were collected together, there was a cry of "Long live the Duke of Guise!"

All these indications of some approaching event of importance at any other moment might have given him an inclination to remain in Paris: but he had other interests more deeply at heart; and, having waited till the last moment to make sure that the king's authorization was still delayed, he prepared to set out that very night, taking with him only the number of persons specified in the passports which he had brought from Soissons.

In a brief and hurried note which he wrote to Chappelle Martean, he informed him that he was about to absent himself from Paris for a short time on business of importance; and begged him, as it was his intention to pass out of the city by the Faubourg St. Germain that very night, to facilitate his so doing as quietly as possible. That his absence might remain for some time concealed from those who might obstruct his proceedings, he retained his apartments at the inn, and the servants he had hired, paying the whole for some time in advance, and directing that, if any inquiries were made, the reply should be that he was only absent for a few days.

When all was prepared he set out, and at the gates found his friend of the Seize, with another personage, who seemed to consider himself of great importance. No words, however, were spoken, no passports were demanded; the two Leaguers bowed lowly to the count, the gates opened as if of themselves, and, issuing forth, the young count rode on upon the way, anxious to place as great a distance between Paris and himself ere the next morning as possible.

It was a soft, calm night in April, the sky was unclouded and filled with stars, the dew thick upon the grass, and the air balmy; and the young nobleman pursued his way with a mind filled with thoughts which, though certainly in part melancholy, were still tinged with the soft light of hope. His horses were strong and fresh; and just in the gray of the morning on the following day he reached the small town of Rambouillet.

The signs and indications of the disturbed and anxious state of society in France were visible in the little town as the young count gazed from the door of the inn, after seeing that his horses were well taken care of. There were anxious faces and eyes regarding the stranger with the expression of doubt, and perhaps suspicion; there were little knots gathered together, and talking gloomily at the corners of different streets; the whistle of the light-hearted peasant was unheard; and the cart or the flock was driven forth in silence.

The count's horses required rest; none were to be procured with which he could pursue his journey, and he determined to take what repose he could get ere he proceeded on his way. Casting himself down, then,

upon a bed, he closed his eyes and sought to sleep: but suddenly something like a wild cry sounded from the other side of the street, and, springing up, he looked out of the window. He could almost have touched the opposite house, so narrow was the way, and he saw completely into a room thereof through the window that faced his own.

There was a woman in it of about the middle age, kneeling by the bedside of a youth who seemed just dead; and, on looking down a little below, he saw a man, dressed in a black serge robe, standing on a ladder, and marking the front of the building with a large white cross. On the impulse of the moment, Charles of Montsoreau ran down stairs and approached the door of the house, intending to enter. But he was stopped at the door by two of the guards of the city. "Do you not see the mark of the plague?" they said. "You must not go in; or, if you go in, you must not come out again."

With a sorrowful heart Charles of Montsoreau turned back into the inn; but he found no sleep, and the image of the woman clasping her dead son still haunted him in waking visions.

CHAPTER II.

It was about nine o'clock at night, and the moon, rising later than the night before, had not yet gone down, as Charles of Montsoreau passed through the wide forest that then surrounded Chateauneuf en Thimerais. It was a beautiful moonlight scene, affording to the eye many various and pleasant objects. The greater part of the forest, indeed, consisted of old trees far apart from each other, and only surrounded by brushwood in patches here and there. Occasionally, indeed, deeper and thicker parts of the forest presented themselves, where the axe had not been plied so unsparingly; but the ground was hilly and broken, and the road ascended and descended continually, showing every change of the forest ground. There were manifold streams, too, in that part of the country, and small gushing fountains,

While a chapel or two, here and there raised by the pious inhabitants of the neighbourhood, broke the desolate appearance of the wood by showing sweet traces of human hope or gratitude. The heart, however, of Charles of Montsoreau enjoyed not that scene as it might at any other time, for many dark and painful reports had reached him of the state of the country in that district; and he looked anxiously forward to his arrival at the little village of Morvillette, seated in the midst of the forest, to hear farther tidings of Châteauneuf and its neighbourhood. A party of soldiers he had already heard had passed along some days before, escorting a carriage, and it was understood their destination was Châteauneuf; but the people of Tremblay, where he received this intelligence, shook the head doubtfully, and added, that the traveller would hear more at Morvillette, and could there get a guide to the chateau, which was two miles from the town.

At length, lying in a hollow of the woodland, the moonlight showed him a group of dark cottages; but no friendly light appeared in the windows; and, as he rode on among the houses, there was a sort of awful stillness about the place, which seemed to indicate that it was not slumber that kept the tongues of the peasantry silent. There were no dogs in the streets; there was no smoke curling up from any of the chimneys; all was still, and many of the doors stood wide open in the night air, exhibiting nothing but solitude within.

"There must be somebody in the place," cried Gondrin, springing from his horse and approaching one of the cottages, the door of which was shut.

Without knocking, the man threw open the door at once, and went in as far as the bridle of his horse would let him; but he came out again immediately, and his master could see that his face was pale and its expression horrified.

"A man and a woman," he said, in a low voice, "both dead! the one in the bed and the other on the floor, and both of them looking as blue as a cloud."

The boy Ignati pressed up his horse to hear; and the count said, "In all probability there may be things still more horrible before us. I shall go on, Gondrin; I must go on: but there is no need for either yourself or the page to do so. You had better both go back. Make the best of your way to Soissons; there tell the duke

what you have seen, and assure him that I will do my best to fulfil his wishes if I live."

"My lord," said the boy, "I might quit you for a kind and noble master when danger was not about you, but I will only quit you now with life."

"And so say I," replied Gondrin, in a somewhat reassured and anxious tone. "But let us ride on, my lord, and get out of this horrible place. We shall find no one here to show us the way."

"I believe I can find it myself," replied the count. "We turn to the left as soon as we have passed the village. Come on!"

Thus saying, he somewhat quickened his pace and rode away, the moon now declining towards her setting, throwing longer shadows, and giving more uncertain light. Anxiously did the young count gaze from the brow of every rise, hoping to see the form of the chateau rising upon the eminence before him. Several times he disappointed himself by fancying that he saw it when it was not there; so that, when at length he beheld a single faint point of light, like the spark of a firefly among the distant branches, he could scarcely believe that it afforded any true indication of that which he sought.

Riding on, however, he again and again caught sight of it, till at length the forms of the building grew more clear and defined; and, after about half a mile more, he rode up the gentle slope that conducted towards the chateau.

It was situated in the midst of a wild game-park, not unlike that of Vincennes, only that the ground was more irregular. The building, however, was very different: it had been erected by that Count de Clairvaut who had been sent ambassador in the reign of Henry II. to the Republic of Venice. He had formed his ideas of beauty of architecture under another sky, and, but that it was somewhat heavier and larger, it might have been supposed that the building had been transported by some geni from the banks of the Brenta. There was a strong old castellated gate, however, in the walls of the park, which had belonged to some former building. But the heavy iron gates were wide open, and the voice of no porter responded to the call of the young count and his companions.

Still, however, he saw a light in the windows of the

chateau, and he eagerly rode on along the path which conducted to the principal gates of the building. Here there was a wide flight of marble stairs, which had been brought ready polished at an immense expense from Italy, yellow and green with the damp, but still altogether of a different hue and consistence from the ordinary stone of the place. From those steps the wide forest scene beyond was fully displayed to the eye, the chateau being built very near the highest point of the acclivity, and the whole ground towards Dreux, Maintenon, and Chartres lying below, with the forest itself sweeping down the edge of that chain of high hills which separates the southern parts of Normandy from the northern parts and Maine.

The moon at that moment was just sinking beyond the trees on the left, and poured over the woods and plains below a flood of silver light, caught and reflected here and there by some open stream or wide piece of water, and, shining full upon the front of the marble building, which, with its pillars, its capitals, and its cornices, its wide doors and spreading porticoes, looked like the spectre of some bright enchanted palace from another land.

The large doors that opened upon the terrace were ajar; and Charles of Montmoreau, leaving his horse with the page, mounted the steps and knocked hard with the hilt of his dagger. A long, melancholy echo was all the sound that was returned. He knocked again; there was no answer; and then pushing open the door, he entered the wide marble hall. The moonlight was pouring through the tall windows, but all was solitary; and, putting his foot upon the first step of the staircase, he was beginning to ascend. At that moment he thought he heard a distant sound, as of an opening door; and a ray of light, streaming down some long corridor at the top of the broad staircase, crossed the balustrade and checkered the iron work with a different hue from the moonlight. He now called loudly, asking if there was any one in the building.

In a moment after there were steps heard coming along towards the staircase, and a voice replied, "There is death and pestilence in the house. If you come for plunder, take it quickly; if you come by accident, fly as fast as you may, for every breath is tainted."

The tones of that voice were not to be mistaken,
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even before Charles of Montsoreau beheld the speaker; but, ere the last words were spoken, Marie de Clair-vaut herself was at the top of the staircase, bearing a small lamp in her hand, and Charles of Montsoreau eagerly sprang up the steps.

The lamp flashed upon the form and features which she had not at first seen, and with a loud cry she darted forward to meet him.

The next moment, however, nearly dropping the lamp, she rushed back, exclaiming, "Come not near, Charles! Dear, dear Charles, come not near! These hands, not twelve hours ago, have closed the eyes of the dead. The plague, most likely, is upon me now!"

But, before she could add more, the arms of Charles of Montsoreau were round her.

"You have called me dear," he said, "and what privilege can be dearer than sharing your fate, whatever it may be! Dear, dear, dear Marie! oh, say those words again, and make me happy!"

"But I fear for you, Charles," she said; "I fear for you. All are either dead, or have fled and left me, and I shall see you die too; you, you die also by the very touch, by the very breath, of one to whom you have restored life."

"I fear not, Marie," answered Charles; "I fear not; and that is the safest guard. Certainly you shall not see me fly and leave you; and I fear not, either, that you will see death overtake me. But oh, if even it did, how sweet would death itself be, watched by that dear face, wept by those beloved eyes!"

Marie bent down her head and said nothing; but she strove no more against the arm that was cast round her; her hand remained in his, and the colour rose warmly into her cheek, which had before been deadly pale.

"If," she said at length, after a long pause, during which he had continued to gaze earnestly, fondly, sadly upon her; "if it were not that I feared for you, your presence would indeed be a comfort and a consolation to me: not that I fear for myself," she added; "I know not why, but I have never feared. It has seemed to me as if there were no danger to myself; as if I should certainly escape. But oh, how terrible it would be to see you struck by the pestilence also!"

"Say no more, dear Marie, say no more," replied Charles of Montsoreau, feeling and knowing by every

word that she was his own. "I fear not; I have no fear; and, even if I had, love would trample it under foot in a moment. I would not leave you in such an hour, not if by descending that short flight of steps I could save myself from death: unless, indeed, you told me to go, and that you loved me not."

The tears sprang into Marie de Clairvaut's eyes. "I must not tell such a falsehood," she cried, clasping her hands together, "in an hour like this. I never told you so; indeed I never did; though Madame de Saulny, poor Madame de Saulny, with her dying lips assured me that you thought so."

"There have been many errors, dear Marie," replied Charles of Montsoreau, "which have pained both your heart and mine, I fear. But now, my beloved, I must call in those that are with me, for we have travelled far and ridden hard."

"Oh, call them not in!" said Marie de Clairvaut, "for they will be frightened when they see the state of the house, and catch the pestilence and die! Bid them lead their horses to the stables, and sleep there. Perhaps they may find some one still living there, for this evening at sunset I saw my father's old groom still wandering about as usual; but you must go yourself to tell them, Charles, for I do not believe that there is any one in the house but you and I. The stables lie away to the left. I will wait here for you till you come back. Go through the great doors," she said, as he descended, "and go not into the rooms either to the right or left, for there is death in all of them."

Charles of Montsoreau descended with a rapid step, and in a few words gave his directions to the servants. He then returned, and taking Marie de Clairvaut's hand in his, he pressed his lips warmly upon it, and gazed tenderly upon her as she led him along through a wide corridor to the room in which she had been sitting.

It formed a strange contrast, the aspect of that room, with the desolate knowledge that all was death and solitude through the rest of the house. Beautiful pictures, rich ornaments, fine tapestry, gave it an air of life and cheerfulness, which seemed strange to the feelings of Charles of Montsoreau. But an illuminated book of prayer that lay upon the table told how Marie de Clairvaut's thoughts had been employed; and Charles of Montsoreau paused, and, lifting his thoughts to Heav-

on, prayed earnestly, fervently, that that bright, and beautiful, and beloved being might still be protected by the hand of the Almighty in every scene of peril and danger which might yet await her.

She sat down on the chair in which she had been reading with a look of melancholy thoughtfulness, and Charles of Montsoreau sat down beside her, and there was a long silent pause, for the hearts of both were too full of agitating feelings for words to be plentiful at first. The moment and the circumstances, indeed, took from love all shame and hesitation. Death, and deprivation, and desolation gave affection a brighter, a holier light; it was like some eternal flame burning upon the altar of a ruined temple.

Marie de Clairvaux felt that at that moment she could speak things that at any other time she would have sunk into the earth to say; she felt that—with the exception of their trust in God—his love for her and hers for him formed the grand consolation of the moment, the healing balm, the great support of that hour of peril and of terror. She looked at him and he at her, and they mutually thought that a few hours perhaps might see them there, dying or dead, by each other's side, with love for the only comfort of their passing hour; with the voice of death pronouncing their eternal union, and the grave their bridal bed.

They thus thought, and it may seem strange to say, but—prepared as their minds were for leaving the life of this earth behind them—such a death to them appeared sweet; and neither feared it, but looked forward upon the grim enemy of human life, not with the stern defying frown of the martyr, not with the fierce and angry daring of the warrior, but with the calm, sweet smile of resignation to the will of Heaven, and hopes beyond the tomb.

Thus they remained silent, or with but few words, for some time; and Charles of Montsoreau felt that he was beloved. Indeed, there was not a word, there was not a look that did not tell him so; and yet he longed to hear more; he longed that those words should be spoken which would confirm, by the living voice of her he loved, the assurance of his happiness. Gradually he won her from conversing of the present to speak of the past; and she gently reproached him for leaving her at Montsoreau so suddenly as he had done.

"Marie," he said, with that frankness which had always characterized him, "let me tell you all, and then see if I did right or wrong. If I did wrong, you shall blame me still, and I will grieve and make any atonement in my power; but if I only mistook, and did not act wrong intentionally, you shall forgive me, and tell me that you love me."

Marie de Clairvaut gazed in his face, and asked, "And do you doubt it now, Charles?"

"Oh, no!" he cried, "oh, no! I ought not to doubt it, for Marie de Clairvaut could not speak such words as she has spoken without loving." And, gently bending down his head over her, he pressed a kiss upon that dear fair brow. "Marie," he said, "it is our fate to meet in strange scenes. The last time that I kissed that brow, the last time that I held you to my heart, was when I thought you dead, and lost to me for ever."

"And when I woke up," replied Marie de Clairvaut, "and was not only grateful to God and to you for having saved me, but happy in its being you that did save me, and happy," she added, slightly dropping her eyes, "in the signs of deep affection which I saw."

"And yet," he exclaimed, "and yet, when my stay or my departure hung upon a single word from your lips, you gave me to understand that you had not received those signs of affection as signs of affection; that you looked upon them but as the natural effect of my witnessing your restoration to life when I thought you dead."

"Oh, Charles!" exclaimed Marie de Clairvaut, with a slight smile, "could you not pardon and understand such small hypocrisy as that? Did you not know that woman's heart is shy, and seeks many a hiding-place, even from the pursuit of one it loves?"

"I never loved but you, Marie," replied the count, "and I am sadly ignorant, I fear, of woman's heart. Nevertheless, upon those few words and that moment depended my fate."

"I knew not that," cried Marie de Clairvaut, eagerly; "I knew not that, or upon my honour I would have been more sincere; but what was it, Charles, made you take so sudden a resolution; what was it made you leave me, without a reply, in the hands of those who have striven constantly ever since to make me believe that you cared not for me?"

"I will tell you all," replied her lover; and, pouring forth in eloquent words all the passion of his heart towards her, he told her how his love had grown upon him, how it had increased each hour; and making that the main subject of his tale, he told but as adjuncts to it the pain which his brother's conduct had inflicted upon him, and all the signs of rivalry which he had remarked. He then spoke of his conversation with the Abbé de Boisguerin on their way to visit the Count de Morly; and he told how agonized were all his feelings, how terrible was the struggle in his heart, and what was the resolution that he took, to ascertain whether her affections were really gained, and by the result to shape his conduct. He next spoke of his conversation with her immediately preceding his departure, and of the words which had led him to believe that she was unconscious of his love, and did not return it.

As she listened the tears rose in her eyes, and laying her soft, fair hand on his, she said, "Forgive me, Charles! oh, forgive me! but do believe that there is not another woman on all the earth who would not have done the same."

"Alas! dear Marie," he replied, "in such knowledge you have but a child to deal with."

"Oh, be so ever, Charles!" she cried, clasping her hands and looking up in his face. "There may be women who would love you less for being so; but I trust and hope that you will never love any one but Marie de Clairvaut, and she will value your love all the more for its being, and having ever been, entirely her own. But you were speaking of the Abbé de Boisguerin, Charles; you have told me of his conversation with you; I saw, when I was at Montsoreau, that you loved and esteemed him." She paused and hesitated. "I fear," she added, "that what I must speak, that what I ought to tell you, may pain and grieve you: I doubt that man, Charles; I more than doubt him."

"And so do I, Marie," replied her lover, with a melancholy shake of the head; "and so do I doubt him much. Indeed, as you say, I more than doubt him, for I know and feel that he is not true."

"Alas! Charles," she replied, "I fear that in that very first conversation with you he meditated treachery towards you. I fear much, very much, that his design and purpose even then was to separate us."

"Perhaps it might be so, Marie," replied her lover: "though he has never shown any strong preference, I have often thought he loves Gaspar better than he does me."

"But it was no love of your brother, Charles," she said; "it was no love of your brother moved him then; for, if your brother trusted him, he betrayed him too. Now hear me, Charles, and let me, as quickly as possible, tell a tale that makes my cheek burn, for it must be told. After you were gone, I avoided your brother's presence as far as might be. I was never with him for a moment alone if I could help it, for I could not but see feelings that were never to be returned. Although there was something from the first in the Abbé de Boisguerin that I loved not, though I could not tell why—something in his eye that made me shrink into myself with a kind of fear—I now courted him to be with me, in order to avoid the persecution of love for which I could not feel even grateful. At first he seemed inclined to give your brother opportunities; and I believe, I firmly believe, that he did so because he knew that those opportunities would but serve to confirm the coldness of my feelings towards him. When he saw that I sought him to be with us, he seemed to yield, and was now with me often almost alone, when there was none but one or two of my women in the farther end of the room. He timed his visits well: and, for a space, well did he choose his conversation too. It was such as he knew must please my ear. He told me of other lands, and of princely scenes beyond the Alps, the beauties of nature, the miracles of art, the graceful but dangerous race of the Medici, the treasures, the unrivalled treasures of Florence and of Rome. I learned to forget the prejudices I had first taken towards him, and he saw that I listened well pleased, and then he ventured to speak of you and of your brother. But oh, Charles, he spoke not as a friend to either. He blamed not, indeed; he even somewhat praised; but he undervalued all and everything. There was not a word of censure, but there was every now and then a light sneer in the tone, a scornful turn of the lip, and curl of the nostril. It pleased me not; and, seeing it, he wisely dropped such themes. He spoke of you no more; but he spoke of himself and of his own history. He told me that his was the more ancient branch of your own family, but

that reverses and misfortunes had overtaken it; and that, careless of wealth or station, and any of the bubbles which the world's grown children follow, he had made no effort to raise his own branch from the ground to which it had fallen. But he said, however, that if he had had an object, a great and powerful object, he felt within himself those capabilities of mind which might raise him over some of the highest heads in the land: and none could hear his voice, and see the keen astuteness of his eye, without believing that what he said was true. And then, again, he spoke of the objects, the few, the only objects, which could induce a man of great and expansive intellect to mingle in the strife and turmoil of the world; and the chief of those objects, Charles, was woman's love. He was a churchman, Charles, and had taken vows which should have frozen such words upon his lips. I was silent, and, I think, turned pale, and he instantly changed the conversation to other things, speaking eloquently and nobly upon great and fine feelings, as I have seen one of the modellers in wax cast on the rough harsh form that he intended to give, and then soften it down with fine and delicate touches, so as to leave it smooth and pleasant to the eye. At length we set out to join my uncle; and your brother now had opportunities of paining me greatly by the open and the rash display of feelings that grieved and hurt me. He took means, too, to find moments to speak with me alone, which I must not dwell upon; means which were unworthy of one of your race, Charles. He tried to deceive me into such interviews by every sort of petty art; and if the Abbé de Boisguerra came to my relief, alas! it was but now to inflict upon me worse persecution. He dared to speak to me, Charles, words that none had ever dared to speak before; words that I must not repeat, that I must not even think of here, so near the holy calmness of the dead. These words were not, indeed, addressed to me directly; but they were used to figure forth what were the passions which an ardent and fiery heart might feel. They were intended evidently to let me know of what he himself was capable: though they breathed of love, there was somewhat of menace in them likewise. The very sound of his voice, the very glare of his eyes, now became terrible to me: but he seemed to consider that I was more in his power now than I had been at Mont-

soreau; and I need not tell you that to me the journey was a terrible one. To end it all, Charles—as I take it for granted that you know some part of what has taken place, even by seeing you here this night—I feel sure that it was by his machinations that I was betrayed into the hands of the king, whom I have all my life been taught to abhor, and by him given up to the power of a relation, from whom I have been sheltered by all my better friends as from the most venomous of serpents.

Charles of Montsoreau had heard all in deep silence, without interrupting her once. He gazed, indeed, from time to time, upon her fair face, watching with love and admiration the bright but transient expressions that came across it: but he listened with full attention and deep thought; and, when she had done, he replied, "What you have told me, dear Marie, indignant as it well may make me, was most necessary for me to hear, and is most satisfactory, for it explains all that I did not before comprehend or understand. His machinations, however, dear Marie, I now trust are at an end. What may be between Villequier and him I do not know; but I trust, dear Marie, I trust in that God who never does fail them that trust in him, that I come to bring you deliverance and to lead you to happiness. It would be long and tedious to tell you, beloved, all that has happened to me since I left you at Montsoreau. Suffice it that I have seen the Duke of Guise; that I have spent the greater part of the time with him; that I have been able, Marie, to serve him; he says, to save his life; and that to me he has intrusted the charge of seeking you and bringing you to join him at Seissons, in despite of any one that may oppose us."

"Oh, joy, joy!" cried Marie de Clairvaut. "When can we set out?" And she rose from her seat as if she hoped their departure might take place that minute. Charles of Montsoreau drew her gently to his heart, and, gazing into her deep tender eyes, he asked, "Will your joy be less, dear Marie, if you know that you go to be at once the bride of Charles of Montsoreau, with the full consent of your princely guardian, given by one who is well worthy to give, to one who is scarcely worthy to receive, such a jewel as yourself!"

Marie de Clairvaut hid her face upon his bosom, murmuring, in a scarcely audible tone, "Can you ask me,

Charles! But oh, let us speed away quickly; for though I, who have been here now several days, and have seen nothing but death and desolation round me ever since I came, have become accustomed to the scene, and, doubtless, to the air also, yet I fear for every moment that you remain here."

"I still fear not, dear Marie," replied Charles of Montsoreau. "Nevertheless, most glad am I to bear you away to happier scenes; and, as soon as the horses have taken some rest, we will set out. And now, dear girl," he added, "I will send you from me. You need some repose, Marie; you need some tranquillity. Leave me then, dear girl, and try to sleep till the hour of our departure, while I will watch here for you, and call you before break of day."

"If you watch, Charles," replied Marie, "I will watch with you, for I need not repose. This morning, after closing the eyes of poor Madame de Saulny, and weeping long and bitterly over her and the poor girl who was the only one that chose to remain with me, exhausted with watching, anxiety, and grief, I fell asleep, and slept long. Before that, I had felt so weary and so heated, that I almost fancied, though without fearing it, that the plague might be coming upon me; but I woke refreshed and comforted just as the sun was going down, and I felt, as it were, a hope and expectation that some change would soon come over my fate. But you need at least refreshment, Charles. In the next room remains my last untasted meal; the last that the poor frightened beings who abandoned me set before their mistress yesterday. I fear not to take you there, Charles, for no one has died in this part of the house."

Charles of Montsoreau followed her, and persuaded her also to take some light refreshment; and there they sat through the live-long night, speaking kind words from time to time, and watching each other's countenances with hope strong at the hearts of both, though somewhat checkered by fears, each for the other.

CHAPTER III.

By the time that the first gray streak checkered the dark expanse of the eastern sky, the horses of Charles of Montsoreau, with three others, were standing on the terrace at the foot of the marble steps. The page and Gondrin were there, and also the old groom, a white-headed man of some sixty years of age, who had booted and spurred himself, and buckled on a sword, declaring that he would accompany his young mistress, if it were but to lead the sumpter horse which carried her baggage. A moment after, Marie herself appeared, and Charles of Montsoreau placed her on the beast that had been prepared for her, while the old groom kissed her hand, saying, "I am glad to see you well, dear lady. But fear not; none of your race and none of mine ever died of the plague either, though I have seen it pass by this place twice before now, and I remember eleven corpses lying on these steps at once."

"There are six within those chambers now," replied Marie, shaking her head mournfully. "But I fear not, good Robin, for myself at least. But you had better lead the way towards Chalet, for the count tells me that Morvillette is deserted."

"Oh, I will lead you safely, lady," replied the old man; "and though very likely they may keep us out of many a house on account of where we come from, there is my daughter's cottage where they will take us in, for they do not fear the plague there."

Thus saying, he mounted his horse, and rode on before through the forest roads, while the lady and her lover followed side by side. As they went on circling round the highest parts of the hills, the gray streaks gradually turned into crimson; the dim objects became more defined in the twilight of morning; a few far-distant clouds at the edge of the sky, tossed into fantastic shapes, began to glow like the burning masses of a furnace; the crimson floated like the waves of a sea up towards the zenith; the fiery red next became mingled with bright streaks of gold; the forest world, just budding into light green, was seen below, with its multitude

of hills and dales, and rocks and streams; the air blew warm and sweet, and full of the balm of spring; and a thousand birds burst forth on every tree, and carolled joyous hymns to the dawning day.

Never broke there a brighter morning upon earth; never rose the sun in greater splendour; never was the air more balmy, or the voices of the birds more sweet. It seemed as if all were destined to afford to those two lovers the strongest, the strangest, the brightest contrast to the dark dull night of anxiety and emotion which they had passed within the palace they had just left behind them. It seemed to both as an image of the dawn of immortality after the tomb; anxiety, sorrow, danger, death left behind, and brightness and splendour spread out before.

Each instinctively drew in the rein as the sun's golden edge was raised above the horizon; each gazed in the countenance of the other, as if to see that no trace of the pestilence was there; and each held out the hand to grasp that of the being most loved on earth, and then they raised their eyes to Heaven in thankfulness and joy.

The old man led them on with scarcely a pause towards Chalet; but about a mile from that place he turned to a little hamlet near, where, in a good farmhouse inhabited by his daughter and her husband, they found their first resting-place. They were gladly received and heartily welcomed, without the slightest appearance of fear, though the circumstances of their flight were known. The farmer and the farmer's wife set before them the best of all they had, the children served them at the table, and the good woman of the house brought forth a large flask of plague-water, and made them drink abundantly, assuring them that it was a sovereign antidote that was never known to fail. They then assigned a room to each, and, though it was still daylight, they gladly retired to rest. Charles of Montsoreau, though much fatigued, slept not for near an hour; but the house was all kept quiet and still, and, with his thoughts full of her he loved, he fancied and trusted that she was sleeping calmly near him, and in an earnest prayer to Heaven he called down blessings on her slumber. At length sleep visited his own eyes, and he rose refreshed and well. Some fears, some anxieties still remained in his bosom till he again saw the coun-

tenance of Marie de Clairvaut. When he did see it, however, fears on her account vanished altogether, for the paleness which had overspread her face the night before had been banished by repose, and the soft warm glow of health was once more upon her cheek. He saw the same anxious look of inquiry upon her countenance; and oh! surely there is something not only sweet and endearing, but elevating also, in the knowledge of such mutual thoughts and cares for each other; something that draws forth even from scenes of pain and peril a joy tender, and pure, and high for those who love well and truly!

"Fear not, dear Marie," he said, "fear not; for I feel well, and you too look well, so that I trust the danger is over."

"Pray God it be!" said Marie de Clairvaut. "But now, when you will, Charles, I am ready to go on; we may soon reach Maintenon."

"We must avoid the road by Maintenon," replied Charles of Montsoreau, "for that would bring us on the hands of the grasping Duke of Epemon, and we could not run a greater risk. Chartres itself is doubtful; but we must take our way thither, and act according to circumstances. However, dear Marie, our next journey must be long and fatiguing: would it not be better for you to stay here to-night, and take as much repose as you can obtain before you go on?"

"Oh no," replied Marie de Clairvaut; "I am well and strong now, and eager to get forward out of all danger. The bright moon will soon be rising, the sun has not yet set, and we may have five or six hours of calm light to pursue our way."

Her wishes were followed; and they were soon once more upon their way towards the fair old town of Chartres. Their former journey had passed greatly in thought, for deep emotions lay fresh upon their hearts, and burdened them: but now they spoke long and frequently upon every part of their mutual situation. The history of every event that had happened to either, since they parted at Montsoreau, was told and dwelt upon with all its details: and while the love of Charles of Montsoreau for his fair companion certainly did not diminish, every word that fell from his lips, every act that she heard him relate, and the manner of relating it also, increased in her bosom that love which she had at

first perceived with shame, but in which she now began to take a pride as well as a joy.

Nor, indeed, did his conduct and demeanour to herself in the circumstances which surrounded them—circumstances of some difficulty and delicacy—change one bright feeling of her heart towards him. There was very much of that tenderness in his nature, that soft, that gentle kindness, which, when joined with courage and strength, is more powerful on the affections of woman than, perhaps, any other quality; and her feelings were changed and rendered more devoted by being dependant upon him for everything; protection, and consolation, and support, and affection, and all those little cares and kindnesses which their mutual situation enabled him to show.

Thus they journeyed on for several hours, and at length reached the town of Chartres, having agreed to pass for brother and sister, as the safest means of escaping observation. It was about eleven o'clock at night when they reached the inn, but they were received with all kindness and hospitality, such as innkeepers ever show to those who seem capable of paying for good treatment. No questions were asked, supper was set before them, and the night passed over again in ease and comfort. Every hour, indeed, that went by without displaying any sign of illness, was in itself a joy; and there was a stillness and a quietness about the old town of Chartres which seemed to quiet all fears of annoyance or interruption.

Charles of Montsoreau was early up, and was waiting for the appearance of Marie de Clairvaut, when the landlord of the inn appeared to inform him that a horse-litter, which he had ordered to be ready for his inspection, had been brought into the courtyard, and was waiting for him to see. At that moment, however, there was a flourish of trumpets in the street; and, looking forth from the window, the young count saw a considerable band of mounted soldiers drawn up, as if about to proceed on their march.

"My sister," he said, turning to the host, "has not yet risen, and she must see the litter, too, as it is for her convenience. But who are these gallant gentlemen before the house, and whither are they going?"

"Why, you might know them, sir, by their plumes and their scarfs," replied the host. "They are a body

of the light horse of the guard of the queen-mother. They are easily distinguished, I ween."

"Ay, but I am a rustic from the provinces," replied the young nobleman: "but they seem gallant-looking soldiers."

"The captain was making manifold inquiries about you and the young lady who arrived last night," replied the landlord, "for he has come with orders to seek and bring back to Paris some young lady and gentleman that have made their escape lately, with eight or nine attendants. But when I told him that you were going to Paris, not coming from it, and that you had only three servants with you, and the young lady was your sister, he said it was not the same, and is now going on. But I must go, lest he should ask for me."

"Well, well," answered the young count, with an air of indifference. "I will be down presently to see the litter; let it wait."

He watched, however, with some anxiety the departure of the body of light horse; for though he did not feel by any means sure that it was himself whom they sought, he did not feel at all secure till the last faint note of their trumpets was heard, as they issued forth from one of the farther gates of Chartres. As soon as Marie de Clairvaut appeared, he purchased the litter without much hesitation, and determined to proceed with all speed towards Dourdan and Corbeil.

The host of the inn would have fain had them stay some time longer, for the young count had paid so readily for the litter, that he judged some gold might be farther extracted from his purse. He asked him, therefore, whether there was nothing in the good town of Chartres to excite his curiosity, and was beginning a long list of marvels; but Charles of Montsoreau cut him short, saying, as he looked up at the sign covered with fleurs-de-lis, "No, no, my good host. I have much business on my hands in which his majesty is not a little concerned, and therefore I must lose no time."

The host nodded his head, looked wise, and suffered the count and his party to depart without farther opposition.

As it was not a part of their plan to follow the high road more than they were actually obliged to do, soon after leaving Chartres they took a path to the left, which they were informed would lead them by Gellardon to

Donnelle, through the fields and woods. Before they had gone a league, however, the noise of dogs and horses, and the shouts, as it seemed, of huntsmen, were heard at no great distance; and, turning towards Gondrin, the young count asked, "What can they be hunting at this time of year?"

"The wolf, my lord, the wolf," replied the man. "They hunt wolves at all times."

Scarcely had he spoken when a loud yell of the dogs was heard; and, nodding his head sagaciously, as if he had seen the whole proceeding with his mind's eye, Gondrin added, "They have killed him;" which was confirmed by a number of joyous shouts on the horns of the huntsmen.

"Let us proceed as fast as possible," said Charles of Montsoreau; "we know not who those huntsmen may be:" and he was urging the driver of the litter to hurry on his horses rapidly, when the whole road before them was suddenly filled with a gay party of cavaliers, splendidly dressed and accoutred, and coming direct towards them. There was nothing now to be done but to pass on quietly, if possible; and, taking no apparent notice, but bending his head and speaking into the litter, without even seeing of whom the other party was composed, Charles of Montsoreau was riding on, when a loud voice was heard exclaiming, "Halt there! halt! A word with you, if you please, young sir;" and, looking up, he saw the Duke of Epemon.

Without suffering the slightest surprise to appear upon his countenance, or the slightest apprehension, Charles of Montsoreau turned his head, demanding calmly, "Well, my lord, what is your pleasure with me?"

"My pleasure is," replied the duke, "that you instantly turn your horse's head and go back to Epemon with me."

"I am extremely sorry, my lord," replied the count, "that it is quite impossible for me to do what you propose, as I am upon urgent business for the Duke of Guise, and bear the king's passport and safe conduct, which I presume your lordship will not despise."

"You may bear the king's passport, sir," said the duke, "but you certainly do not bear his authorization to carry away from his power the young lady who I suppose is in that litter. As to the Duke of Guise, your authority from him is very much doubted also."

"That doubt is easily removed, my lord," replied the count, seeing clearly that he would be forced to yield, but fully resolved not to do so till he had tried every means to avoid it. "That doubt is easily removed, my lord. Allow me to show you the authority given me by the duke under his own hand, which I think even the Duke of Epernon must respect."

The duke took the paper which he tendered him, and then saying, "I will show you how I respect it," he tore it into a thousand pieces, and cast it beneath his horse's feet, while a laugh ran through the men that attended him. "Turn your horse's head," he continued, "without more ado, or I will have your arms tied behind your back, and the horse led."

"My lord," replied the young count, "I must obey, for I have no means of resisting; but let me remind you, that the Duke of Epernon was always considered, even before what he is now, a gallant gentleman and a man of good feeling, who would not insult those who were too weak to oppose him, and who did their duty honourably as far as it was possible for them to do it."

"Your civility now, sir," replied the duke, "like your rash folly a week or two ago, is too contemptible to make any change in the Duke of Epernon. That foolish party of light horse," he continued, speaking to one of his attendants, "must have suffered this malapert youth and his fair charge to pass it. Turn the litter round there; take care that none of them escape."

"The boy has made off already," replied one of the men. "Shall I gallop after him, my lord? He may tell the Duke of Guise."

"Let him!" answered Epernon. "Go not one of you; but bring the rest of them along hither."

Without giving any intimation of his intent, Charles of Montsoreau turned his horse suddenly back to the side of the litter, and drew the curtain back, saying to Marie de Clairvaut, who sat pale and anxious within it, "You hear what has happened; there is no power of resistance, for they are ten to one: but the boy has escaped, and will give the duke notice of where you are. In the mean time, it is one comfort, that now you are in the hands of one who is, at all events, a man of honour, and a gentleman in feeling."

What he said was intended to give comfort and consolation to Marie de Clairvaut; but it reached the ear

of the Duke of Epemon likewise. "I must suffer no farther conversation," he said, in a gentler tone than he had before used. "You will understand, Monsieur de Logères, that I have authority for what I do; and that I arrest you out of no personal vengeance, but because the order has been already given to that effect."

"My lord," replied the young count, "I care very little for my own arrest, as I know that I can but be detained a short time: but I confess I am most anxious for the young lady placed under my especial charge by the Duke of Guise, as I have shown your lordship by the paper you have torn. If she is to remain in your lordship's charge, I shall be more satisfied; but if she is to be given up to Monsieur de Villequier, the consequences will indeed be painful to all. You are perhaps not aware, my lord, that he sent her to a place where the plague was raging at the time, where six persons of her household died of it, and the rest fled, leaving her utterly alone."

The duke seemed moved, and, after remaining silent for a minute, he replied, "I did not know it; the man who would murder his wife would make no great scruple of killing his cousin, I suppose. However, sir, set your mind at ease: though I cannot promise that she shall remain with the Duchess of Epemon, she shall not be given up to Villequier either by myself or by anybody in whose hands I may place her. Is that assurance sufficient for you?"

"Perfectly, my lord," replied Charles of Montsoreau. "The Duke of Epemon's promise is as good as the bond of other men."

"Well, follow me, then," replied the duke; and, riding on alone, he left the young count in the hands of his attendants.

CHAPTER IV.

It was in one of the saloons of the old Cardinal de Bourbon, in the town of Soissons, that Henry, duke of Guise, princely in his habit, princely in his aspect, with his foot raised upon a footstool of crimson and gold, a high plumed Spanish hat upon his head, manifold parch-

ments before him, and a pen in his hand, sat alone on a day in the month of April, with his eyes fixed upon a door at the other end of the room, as if waiting for the entrance of some one.

The next moment the door was thrown wide open, and, preceded by two servants announcing him to the duke, appeared a small and not very striking personage, plainly habited in black velvet. The moment the duke saw him, he rose, and for an instant uncovered his head; then covering himself again, he advanced to meet him, and took him by the hand, saying, "Monsieur de Bellievre, I am delighted to see you. The king could not have chosen any one more gratifying to myself to receive: in the first place, because I know that I shall hear nothing but truth from the lips of Monsieur de Bellievre; and, in the next place, because I am sure no one will bear more exactly to his majesty any reply I may have to make to the message with which I understand you are charged."

"The confidence which your highness expresses in me," replied Bellievre, as the duke led him towards the table, and made him seat himself beside him, "does great honour to so humble an individual as myself. Nevertheless, I must deliver the king's message, my lord, precisely as it was given to me; and should there be anything in it disagreeable to your highness, I trust that you will excuse the bearer, and consider the matter dispassionately."

"Proceed, proceed," replied the duke; "as in duty bound, I shall receive his majesty's communication with all deference and humility."

"Well, then," replied Bellievre, "I am charged by his majesty to assure your highness that his personal esteem and respect for you is very great; and that he has never, in any degree, given ear to the injurious reports which persons inimical to your highness have been industrious in circulating to your disadvantage."

"Your pardon, Monsieur de Bellievre, for one moment," said the duke, interrupting him. "To what injurious reports does his majesty allude? I am ignorant that any one has dared to circulate injurious reports of me; and, if such be the case, it is high time that I should proceed to the capital to confront and shame my accusers."

As this was not at all the point to which the king's

envoy wished to bring the duke, he looked not a little embarrassed what to reply. He answered, however, after a moment's pause, "It would, indeed, be requisite for you to do so, my lord, if I did not bear you the king's most positive assurance that he gives no ear to such reports. But to proceed: his majesty has bid me strongly express his full conviction of your attachment, fidelity, and affection, but has commanded me to add that, having heard it reported your intention is immediately to present yourself in Paris, he is unwillingly obliged, by state reasons of the utmost importance, to request that you would forbear the execution of that purpose."

It was not without some hesitation and apparent emotion that Bellievre spoke; but the duke heard him with perfect calmness, though with a slight contraction of the brow.

"The report," he answered, "of my intention of visiting Paris is perfectly correct, Monsieur de Bellievre; nor can I, indeed, refrain from executing that purpose, with all due deference to his majesty, for many reasons, among which those that you yourself give me of injurious rumours being rife in the capital regarding me are not the least cogent. Thus, unless the king intends to signify by you, Monsieur de Bellievre, that he positively prohibits my coming into Paris—which, of course, he would not do—I see not how I can avoid doing simple justice to myself by returning to my own dwelling in the capital of this country."

"I grieve to say, your highness," replied Bellievre, seeing that the worst must be told, "I grieve to say that, while the king has charged me to assure you of his regard and his confidence in you, he none the less instructed me to make the prohibition on his part absolute and distinct."

The Duke of Guise started up, with his brow knit and his eyes flashing. "Is this the reward," he exclaimed, "of all the services I have rendered the state? Is this the recompense for having shed my blood so often in defence of France? to be dishonoured in the eyes of all the people by being banished from the metropolis; to be excluded from the companionship of all my friends; to be cut off from transacting my own private affairs; to be talked of and pointed at as the exiled Duke of Guise, and to have the boys singing in the streets the woful ditty of my sufferings and a king's in-

gratitude!" And, as he spoke, the duke took two or three rapid strides up and down the room.

"Indeed, indeed, your highness," cried Bellievre, "you take it up too warmly. The king is far from ungrateful, but most thankful for your high services; but it is for the good of the state that you love, for the safety of the people of the capital, who are in a tumultuous and highly excitable state, that he wishes you to refrain from coming—"

"That he sends me a message dishonouring to myself and to my house," replied the duke. "That he marks me out from the rest of the nobles of the land, by a prohibition which I may venture to say is unjust and unmerited. I must take some days to think of this, Monsieur de Bellievre; nor can I in any way promise not to visit Paris. Were it but to protect, support, and guide my friends and relations, I ought to go; were it but on account of the church, for which I am ready to shed my blood if it be necessary, persecuted, reviled, assailed as that holy church is; were it but for my attendants and supporters, who are attacked, abused, and ill-treated in the streets and public ways."

"As for the church, your highness," replied Bellievre, "none is more sincerely attached to it than the king and the king's advisers. It will stand long, my lord, depend upon it, without any farther assistance than that which you have already so ably given it. Your relations, my lord, and household," he said, "are not and cannot be ill-treated."

"How!" exclaimed the duke. "Is not my dear sister Margaret even now, as it were, proscribed by the king and his court? Is not everything done to drive her from Paris? Have not her servants been struck by those of Villequier in the open streets?"

"I know," replied Bellievre, "that a month or two ago Madame de Montpensier was subject to some little annoyance; but, as soon as it came to the king's ears, he had it instantly remedied, and only wished her to quit Paris for her own security."

"The house of Guise, sir, have always been secure in the capital of France," replied the duke; "and, I trust, always will be."

"Nothing has occurred since, I trust, my lord," continued Bellievre. "The king is most anxious that you should have satisfaction in everything, and will give

you the strongest assurances that your family, your household, and your friends shall be in every respect well treated and protected, as, indeed, he has always wished them to be."

The duke threw himself down in his chair, and rang the bell that stood upon the table violently. "Ho! without there!" he exclaimed. "Bring in that page that arrived hither a night or two ago, when I was absent at Jamets."

The attendant who had appeared retired, and the duke sat silent, gazing with a frown at the papers on the table. "May I ask your highness," said Bellievre, not knowing what interpretation to put upon his conduct, "may I ask your highness whether I am to conceive my audience at an end?"

"No, Monsieur de Bellievre, no," replied the duke, in a milder tone; "for *you* I have a high respect and esteem, and will listen to you on this subject longer than I would to most men. I wish you to hear and to know how the friends of the Duke of Guise are treated; what protection and favour is shown to them at the court of France. Perhaps you will hear some things that are new to you; perhaps they may be new to the king, too," he added, a slight sneer curling his haughty lip. "But, be that as it may, Monsieur de Bellievre, I think I can show you good cause why the Duke of Guise should be no longer absent from Paris. Come hither, boy," he added, as the page Ignati entered the room; "come hither, boy, and answer my questions. Thou art both witty and honest, but give me plain, straightforward replies. Stand at my knee and answer, so that this gentleman may hear."

The boy advanced, and did as the duke bade him, turning his face towards Bellievre, with his left hand to the duke.

"You went to Paris," said Guise, "with my friend the young Count of Logères, did you not? Were you aware of the cause of his going?"

"He went, I understood your highness," replied the boy, "to seek a young lady, a relation of your own, who had been carried to Paris by a body of the king's troops while on her way to join your highness."

"Can you tell what was Monsieur de Logères' success?" said the duke.

"I know he saw the king," replied the boy, "and

heard that he had been promised a letter to all the governors and commanders in different places to aid him in seeking for the young lady, and bringing her back to your highness. I heard also that it was for this paper he waited from day to day in Paris, but that it never came."

"I beg your highness's pardon," said Bellievre, interrupting the boy, "but you will remark that this is all hearsay. He does not seem to speak at all from his own knowledge."

"That will come after," answered the duke, somewhat sharply. "Go on, Ignati. What do you know more?"

"What I have said," replied the boy, "is more than hearsay, my lord; for, while we stayed in Paris, the good count bade us always be ready at a moment's notice to set out, for he could not tell when the letter from Monsieur de Villequier would arrive. It never came, however; and one night the count having, as I understood, gained information of where Mademoiselle de Clairvaut was, set out with his man Gondrin and myself to seek her. We found that she had been brought by a body of the king's troops to a chateau or a palace, for it looked more like a palace than a chateau, called Morvillette, I believe near Chateauneuf, where the plague was then raging when the king's soldiers left her. By the time we arrived the plague had reached the chateau, six or seven people were dead, and all the rest had fled, leaving the young lady with nobody in the palace, and none but one old groom in the stables."

The duke's eye fixed sternly upon the countenance of Bellievre, and he muttered between his teeth, "This is the doing, Monsieur de Bellievre, of my excellent good friend, the King of France. Go on, boy; go on! Proceed. What happened next?"

"The lady was most joyous of her deliverance," continued the boy, "and eager to come to your highness; and we set out the next morning before day-break, and reached Chartres, where the count bought a litter for her greater convenience. At a short distance from Chartres, however, we were met by the Duke of Epemon and his train wolf-hunting, and the duke immediately stopped us, and insisted upon the count going back with him to Epemon. The count produced the

king's passports, but the duke said that there were doubts of his being authorized by you."

"Did he not show him my own letter?" exclaimed the duke. "Did he not show him the authority I gave him under my own hand?"

"He did, my lord, he did," replied the boy; "but the Duke of Epernon said he would show in what respect he held your highness's letter; and, tearing it in several pieces, he threw it down under his horse's feet."

Bellievre continued to look down upon the ground with a brow which certainly displayed but little satisfaction. The Duke of Guise, however, though he had been frowning the moment before, now only smiled as the boy related the incident of the letter; the smile was somewhat contemptuous, indeed; but he said merely, "Go on, boy. What happened next?"

"Nay, my lord," replied the boy, "what happened to them I know not; for, seeing that the duke held them prisoners, and was taking them back to Epernon, I made my escape as fast and as well I could, and came hither to tell you into whose hands the young lady and Monsieur de Logères had fallen."

"You did quite right, boy," said the duke; "and now you may retire. You hear, Monsieur de Bellievre," he continued, "with what kindness, protection, support, and generosity the king treats the friends of the Duke of Guise! First he casts my poor niece's child into the hands of Villequier, something worse than those of the hangman of Paris, and then between them they send her into the midst of the pestilence; then comes Monsieur d'Epernon to confirm all, arrests my friend bearing the king's own passports and safeguard, seizes upon my own relation and ward, and carries them both I know not whither."

"Perhaps, your highness," said Bellievre, "the Duke of Epernon might have motives that we do not know. At all events, the king—"

"Fy, Monsieur de Bellievre, fy!" exclaimed the duke, vehemently. "I will tell you what! It is time the Duke of Guise were in Paris, if but to deliver the king from such Dukes of Epernon who abuse his authority, disgrace his name, absorb his favours, ruin the state, overthrow the church, and dare do acts that make men blush for shame. France will no longer suffer him, sir; France will no longer suffer him! If I free not the king

from him and such as he is, the people will rise up and commit some foul attempt upon the royal authority. What," he continued, with fierce scorn, "what though he be Baron of Caumont, Duke of Epemon, raised out of his place to sit near the princes of the blood, governor of Metz and Normandy, of the Boulonnais and Aunis, of Touraine, Saintonge, and Angoumois, colonel-general of infantry, and governor of Anjou, a knight of the order of the Holy Ghost! he shall find this simple steel sword of Henry of Guise sufficiently sharp to cut his parchments into pieces, and send him back a beggar to the class he sprung from."

The duke spoke so rapidly that to interrupt him was impossible; and so angrily, that Bellievre, overawed, remained silent for a moment or two after he had done, while the prince bent his eyes down upon the table, and played with the golden tassels of his swordknot, as if half ashamed of the vehemence he had displayed.

"I did not come here, your highness," he said, "either as the envoy or the advocate of the Duke of Epemon. You must well know that there is no great love between us; and I doubt not, when your highness comes to call him to account for his deeds, that justice will be found entirely on your side. But I came on the part of the king; and I beseech you to consider, my good lord, what may be the consequences of pressing even any severe charges against the Duke of Epemon at this moment, when his majesty is contending with the heretics on the one side, and is somewhat troubled by an unruly people on the other."

"Is he indeed contending with anybody or anything, Bellievre?" demanded the duke. "Is he indeed contending against the Bearnois? Is he contending against the indolence of his own nature, or, rather, against the indolence into which corrupt favourites have cast him? Is he contending against the iniquities of Villequier, or the exactions of Epemon? Is he contending against anything less contemptible than a spaniel puppy or an unteachable parrot? My love and attachment to the king and his crown, Bellievre, are greater than yours; and, as my final reply, I beg you humbly to inform his majesty on my part, that if I do not promptly and entirely obey him in this matter of not coming to Paris, it is solely because I am compelled to do as I do, for the good of the church, for the safety of the state, for the

security of my own relations and friends, and even for the benefit of his majesty himself. This is my final reply."

"Yet one word, my lord," replied Bellievre. "At all events, if your determination to visit the capital be taken, will you not at least, at my earnest prayer, delay your journey till I myself can return to Paris, and, obtaining more ample explanation of the king's purposes, come back to you and confer with you farther on the subject."

"I see not, Monsieur de Bellievre," said the Duke of Guise, "what good could be obtained by such delay. I do not at all mean to say that you would take advantage of my confidence to prepare any evil measures against me; but others might do so: and, besides, my honour calls me not to leave my friends in peril for a moment, even though I called upon my head the enmity of a whole host in stepping forward to rescue them."

"I pledge you my honour, my lord," replied Bellievre, "that if you will consent to delay, no measures shall be taken against you; and I will do the very best I can to induce the king to make any atonement in his power to your friends. As to this young Count of Logères, I never heard of him before to-day, and know not what has been done with him at all; and in regard to Mademoiselle de Clairvaut, she is doubtless in the hands of Villequier, who, I understand, claims the guardianship."

"To which he has less right," replied the duke, angrily, "than that footstool; and if he contends with me, I will spurn him as I do it;" and he suited the gesture to the word. "But still I see not," continued the duke, "what is to be gained by this delay to either party."

"This, my good lord," replied Bellievre. "I am well aware that his majesty the king has sent me here without sufficient powers to make you just and definite proposals. This I believe to have been entirely from the haste in which I came away, there being no time for thought. But if you permit me to return with assurance that you will wait but a few days, I feel convinced that I shall come back to you with offers so abundant, so satisfactory, and so well secured, that your lordship will change your resolution."

The duke mused for a moment or two. "Well, Monsieur de Bellievre," he said at length, "though I entertain no such hopes as you do, I must yield something to

my loyalty and to my real desire of obeying the king ; although, perhaps, my duty to my country and to the church might well lead me to more prompt proceedings. I will therefore delay my journey for a day or two ; but you must use all speed, and I must have no trifling. You know all my just grievances : those must be remedied, the church must be secured ; and for the quiet and the satisfaction of the people, who abhor and detest him, as well as for the relief of the nobles, who have long been shut out from all favour by that unworthy minion, this John of Nogaret, this Duke of Epemon, must be banished from the court and councils of the king, and stripped of the places and dignities which he has won from the weak condescension of the monarch. You understand me, Monsieur de Bellievre," he said, in a sterner tone, seeing that Bellievre looked somewhat dismayed at the extent of his demands. "Undertake not the mission if you think that you cannot succeed in it, but let me on my way without more opposition."

"My lord, I will do my best to succeed," replied Bellievre ; "and trust that I shall do so. How many days will your highness give me ?"

"Nay, nay," replied the duke, "that I cannot tell, Monsieur de Bellievre. Suffice it, I will delay as long as my honour permits me ; and you, on your part, lose not an hour in making the necessary arrangements and bringing the king's reply."

As he spoke the duke rose to terminate the conference ; and then added, "I fear, Monsieur de Bellievre, as I am expecting every moment my brother, the Cardinal de Guise, and his Eminence of Bourbon, to confer with me upon matters of importance, I cannot do the honours of the house to you as I could wish ; but Pericard, my secretary and friend, will attend upon you, and ensure that you have every sort of refreshment. I will send for him this moment." And, so doing, he placed Bellievre in the hands of his secretary, and turned once more to other business.

The king's envoy sped back to Paris, scarcely giving himself time to take necessary refreshment ; but, on his arrival in the capital, he first found a difficulty even in seeing the monarch ; and, when he did see him, found him once more plunged in that state of luxurious and effeminate indolence from which he was only roused by occasional fits of excitement, which sometimes enabled

him to resume the monarch and the man, but more frequently carried him into the wildest and most frantic excesses of debauchery.

Henry would scarcely listen to the business of Bellievre even when he granted him an audience on the following morning. He asked many a question about his cousin of Guise, about his health, about his appearance, about his dress itself; whether his shoes were pointed or square, and how far the haut-de-chausses came down above his knees. Bellievre was impatient, and pressed the king with some fire; but Henry only laughed, and tickled the ears of a monkey that sat upon the arm of his chair with a parrot's feather. The animal mouthed and chattered at the king, and strove to snatch the feather out of his hands; and Henry, stroking it down the head, called it "Mon Duc de Guise."

Bellievre bowed low and moved towards the door. "Come back to-morrow, Bellievre; come back to-morrow," said the king; "Villequier will be here then. You see at present how importantly I am occupied with my fair cousin of Guise here;" and he pulled the monkey's whiskers as he spoke. "Villequier has told me all about it," he added. "He says the duke will not come, and so says my mother; and if they both say the same thing, who never agreed upon any point before, it must be true, Bellievre, you know."

"I trust it may, sire," replied Bellievre, dryly, and quitted the room with anger and indignation at his heart. Before he had crossed the anteroom, he heard a loud laugh ringing like that of a fool from the lips of the monarch; and although it was doubtless occasioned by some new gambol of the monkey, it did not serve to diminish the bitter feelings which were in the diplomatist's bosom.

CHAPTER V.

In a small, dark, oaken cabinet, with one window high up and barred, a lamp hanging from the ceiling, a table with books and a musical instrument, several chairs, and a silver bell, Charles of Montsoreau was

seated several days after the period at which we last left him. A bedroom, well furnished in every respect, was beyond; the least sound of the silver bell produced immediate attendance; nothing was refused him that he demanded; nothing was wanting to his comfort except liberty and the sound of some other human being's voice. Yet, strange to say, although he knew that he was in the city of Paris, he knew nothing more of the position of the building in which he was placed. He had been brought into the capital at night, had been conducted through a number of narrow and tortuous streets, and had at length been led through a deep archway and several large courts to the place in which he was now confined.

It may seem, perhaps, that such a state of imprisonment did not offer much to complain of; and yet it had bent his spirit and bowed down his heart. The want of all knowledge of what was passing around him, the absence of every one that he loved, the loss of liberty, the perfect silence, joined with anxiety for one who was dearer than himself, wore him day by day, and took from him the power of enjoying any of those things which were provided for his convenience or amusement.

The servant who attended upon him never opened his lips; he obeyed any orders that were given to him; he brought anything that was demanded; but he replied to no questions, he made no observations, he afforded no information even by a look. Every bolt and bar that was on the outside of the door was invariably drawn behind him, and the high window in either room could only be so far reached, even by standing on the table or one of the chairs, as to enable the young nobleman to open or shut it at pleasure, so to admit the free air from without.

Such had been the condition of Charles of Montsoreau, as we have said, for many days; but he had not yet become reconciled in any degree to his fate, though he strove, as far as possible, to while away the moments in any way that was permitted, either by books or music. But it was with impatience and disgust that he did so, and the lute was taken up and laid down, the book read and cast away, without remaining in his hands for the space of five minutes.

The sun shone bright through the high window, and

traced a moving spot of golden light upon the dark oak of the opposite wainscot; the air of spring came sweet and pleasantly through, and gave him back the thoughts and dreams of liberty; a wild plant, rooted in the stonework of the building without, cast its light feathery shadow on the wall where the sun shone; and the hum and roar of distant multitudes, pursuing their busy course in the thronged thoroughfares of the city, brought him his only tidings from the hurried and struggling scene of human life.

He took a pleasure in watching the leaves of the little plant, as, waved about by the wind, they played against the bars of the window, and he was thus occupied on the day we have mentioned, when suddenly something crossed the light for a moment, as if some small bird had flown by; but, at the same instant, a roll of paper fell at his feet, and, taking it up, he recognised the well-known writing of the Duke of Guise.

"You have suffered for my sake," the paper said, "and I hasten to deliver you. The day of the Eperons is over; your place of imprisonment is known. Be not dispirited, therefore, for relief is at hand."

It cannot be told how great was the relief which this note itself brought to the mind of the young count; not alone by the promise that it held out, but by the very feeling that it gave him of not being utterly forgotten, of being not entirely alone and desolate. He read it over two or three times, and then hearing one of the bolts of the door undrawn, he concealed it hastily lest the attendant should see it.

Another bolt was immediately afterward pulled back, and then the door was unlocked, though far more slowly than usual. It seemed to the young count that an unaccustomed hand was busy with the fastenings, and a faint hope of speedy deliverance shot across his mind.

The next instant, however, the door was opened, and though it certainly was not the usual attendant who appeared, no face presented itself that was known to Charles of Montsoreau. The figure was that of a woman, tall, stately, and dressed in garments of deep black, fitting tightly round the shoulders and the waist, and flowing away in ample folds below. Her hair was entirely covered by black silk and lace, but her face was seen; and that face was one which instantly drew all attention to itself.

It was not, indeed, the beauty which attracted, though there were great remains of beauty too, but it was the face not only of an old woman, but of one who had been somewhat a spendthrift of youth's charms. There was, however, a keen fire in the eyes, a strong determination on the brow, an expansion of the nostril, which gave the idea of quick and eager feelings, and a degree of sternness about the whole line of the features, which would have made the whole countenance commanding, but harsh and severe, had it not been for a light and playful smile that gleamed across the whole, like some of the bright and sudden rays of light that from time to time we see run across the bosom of deep still shady waters.

There was a degree of mockery in that smile, too; and yet it spoke affections and feelings which as strangely blended with the general character of that woman's life, as the smile itself did with the general expression of her countenance. The hands were beautiful and delicately small, and the figure good, with but few signs of age about it.

The young count gazed upon her with some surprise as she entered, but instantly rose from the seat in which he had been sitting while reading the Duke of Guise's note; and the lady, with a graceful inclination of the head, closed the door, advanced and seated herself, examining the young count from head to foot with a look of calm consideration, which he very well understood implied the habitual exercise of authority and power.

After thus gazing at him for a moment or two, she said, "Monsieur le Comte de Logères, do you know me?"

"If you mean, madam," he replied, "to ask me if I recognise your person, I believe I do; but if you would ask absolutely whether I know you, I must say no."

One of those light smiles passed quick across her countenance, and she said in a low voice, as if speaking to herself, "Who ever did know me?" She then added, "Who, then, do you suppose I am?"

"I conclude, madam," replied the young count, "that I stand in the presence of her majesty the queen-mother."

"Such is the case," replied the queen; "and I have come to visit you, Monsieur de Logères, with views and purposes which, were I to tell them to any person at my son's court, would hardly be believed."

The queen paused as if waiting for an answer; and the young count replied, "I trust, madam, that if I am detained here by the directions and in the power of your majesty, that you have come to give me liberty, which would, I suppose," he added, with somewhat of a smile, "be rather marvellous to the courtiers of the king."

Catharine de Medicis smiled also, but at the same time shook her head. "I fear I must not give you liberty," she said, "for I have promised not: but I have come with no bad intent towards you. I knew your mother, Monsieur de Logères, and a virtuous and beautiful woman she was. God help us! it shows that I am growing old, my praising any woman for her virtue. However, she was what I have said, and as unlike myself as possible. Perhaps that was the reason that I liked her, for we like not things that are too near ourselves. However, I have come hither to see her son, and to do him a pleasure. You play upon the lute!" she continued. "Come, 'tis a long time since I have heard the lute well played. Take up the instrument, and add your voice to it."

"Alas! madam," replied the young count, "I am but in an ill mood for music. If I sang you a melancholy lay, it would find such stirring harmonies in my own heart, that I fear I should drown the song in tears; and if I sang you a gay one, it would be all discord. I would much rather open that door which you have left unlocked behind you, and go out."

The queen did not stir in the slightest degree, but gazed upon him attentively with a look of compassion, answering, "Alas! poor bird, you would find that your cage has a double door. But come, do as I bid you; sit down there, take up the lute, and sing. Let your song be neither gay nor sad! Let it be a song of love. I doubt not that such a youth as you are will easily find a love ditty in your heart, though the present inspiration be no better than an old woman. Come, Monsieur de Logères, come; sit down and sing. I am a judge of music, I can tell you."

With a faint smile, the count did as she bade him; and, taking up the lute, he ran his fingers over the chords, thought for a moment or two, and recollecting nothing better suited to the moment, he sang an Italian song of love, in which some time before he had ventured to shadow forth to Marie de Clairvaut, when she

was at Montseuau, the first feelings of affection that were growing up in his heart. The queen sat by in the mean time, listening attentively, with her head a little bent forward, and her hand marking the cadences on her knee.

"Beautifully sung, Monsieur de Logères," she said at length, when he ended. "Beautifully sung, and as well accompanied. You do not know how much pleasure you have given. Now let us talk of other things. Are you sincere, man?"

"I trust so, madam," replied the count. "I believe I have never borne any other character."

"Who taught you to play so well on the lute?" demanded the queen, abruptly.

"I have had no great instruction, madam," answered the count, somewhat surprised. "I taught myself a little in my boyhood. But afterward my preceptor, the Abbé de Boisgueria, was my chief instructor. He had learned well in Italy."

"Did he teach you sincerity too?" demanded the queen, with a keen look; "and did he learn that in Italy?"

The count was not a little surprised to find Catharine's questions touch so immediately upon the late discoveries he had made of the character of the Abbé de Boisgueria, and he replied with some bitterness, "He could but teach me, madam, that which he possessed himself. I trust that to my nature and my blood I owe whatever sincerity may be in me. I learned it from none but from God and my own heart."

"Then you know him," said the queen, reaching the point at once; "that is sufficient at present on that subject. I know him too. He came to the court of France several years ago, with letters from my fair cousin the cardinal; but he brought with him nothing that I wanted at that time. He had a wily head, a handsome person, manifold accomplishments, great learning, and services for the highest bidder. We had too many such things at the court already, so I thought that the sooner he was out of it the better, and looked cold upon him till he went. He understood the matter well, and did not return till he brought something in his hand to barter for favour. However, Monsieur de Logères, to turn to other matters, I do believe you may be sincere after all. I shall discover in a minute, however. Will you answer me a question or two concerning the Duke of Guise?"

"It depends entirely upon what they are, madam," replied the count, at once.

"Then you will not answer me every question, even if it were to gain your liberty."

"Certainly not, madam," replied the count.

"Then the duke has been speaking ill of me," said Catharine; at once, "otherwise you would not be so fearful."

"Not so, indeed," replied the count, eagerly. "The duke never, in my presence, uttered a word against your majesty."

"Then will you tell me, as a man of honour," demanded the queen, "exactly, word for word, what you have ever heard the duke say of me?"

Charles of Montsoreau paused and thought for a moment, and then answered, "I may promise you to do so in safety, madam, for I never heard the duke speak of you but twice, and then it was in high praise."

"Indeed!" she replied. "But still I believe you, for Villequier has been assuring me of the contrary, and, of course, what he says must be false. He cannot help himself, poor man. Now tell me what the duke said, Monsieur de Logères. Perhaps I may be able to repay you some time."

"I seek for no bribe, your majesty," replied the count, smiling; "and, indeed, the honour and the pleasure of this visit—"

"Nay, nay! You a courtier, young gentleman!" exclaimed the queen, shaking her finger at him. "Another such word as that, and you will make me doubt the whole tale."

"The speech would not have been so courtier-like, madam, if it had been ended," replied the count. "I was going to say, that the honour and pleasure of this visit, after not having heard for many days, many weeks I believe, the sound of a human voice, or seen any other face but that of one attendant, is full repayment for the little I have to tell. However, madam, to gratify you with regard to the duke, the first time that I ever heard him mention you was in the city of Rheims, where a number of persons were collected together, and many violent opinions were expressed, with which I will not offend your ears; your past life was spoken of by some of the gentlemen present—"

"Pass over that, pass over that! I understand!" re-

plied the queen, with a sarcastic smile; "I understand. But those things are not worth speaking of. What of the present, Monsieur de Logères? What of the present?"

"Why, some one expressed an opinion, madam," the count continued, "that, in order to retain a great share of power, you did everything you could to keep his majesty in the lethargic and indolent state in which I grieve to say he appears to the great mass of his subjects."

"What said the duke?" demanded the queen. "What said the duke! surely he knows me better."

"Why, madam," replied the count, "his eye brightened and his colour rose, and he replied indignantly that it could not be so. 'Oh no,' he said, 'happy had it been for France if, instead of divided power, the queen-mother had possessed the whole power. It is by petty minds mingling their leaven with their great designs that ruin has come upon the land. She has had to deal with great men, great events, and great difficulties, and she was equal to deal with, if not to bow them all down before her, had she but been permitted to deal with them unshackled.'"^{*}

"Indeed!" exclaimed the queen; "did he say so?"

"He did, madam, upon my honour," replied the count.

"I know not whether he was right or wrong," rejoined the queen, thoughtfully; "for though perhaps, Monsieur de Logères, I possessed in some things the powers of a man—say, if you will, greater powers than most men—yet, alas! in others I had all the weaknesses of a woman; perhaps I should say, to balance other qualities, more weaknesses than most women. But he must have said more. The answer was not pertinent to the remark, and Henry of Guise is not a man either in speech or action ever to forget his object."

"Nor did he in this instance," replied the count; "but he said that, wearied out with seeing your best and greatest schemes frustrated by the weakness of others, you now contented yourself with warding off evils as far as possible from your son and from the state; that it was evident that such was your policy; and that, like Miron, the king's physician, unable from external circumstances

^{*} Such was undoubtedly the expressed opinion of the Duke of Guise.

to effect a cure, you treated the diseases of the times with a course of palliatives; that, as the greatest of all evils, you knew and saw the apathy of his majesty, and did all that you could to rouse him, but that the poisonous counsels of Villequier, the soft indolence of his own nature, and the enfeebling society of Epemon and others, resisted all that you could do, and thwarted you here likewise."

"He spoke wisely, and he spoke truly," replied the queen; "and I will tell you, Monsieur de Logères, though Henry of Guise and I can never love each other much, yet I felt sure that he knew me too well to say all those things of me that have been reported by his enemies. I am satisfied with what I have heard, count, and shall ask no farther questions. But you have given me pleasure, and I will do my best to serve you. Once more, let us speak of other things. Have you all that you desire and want here?"

"No, madam," replied the young count. "I want many things; liberty, the familiar voices of my friends, the sight of those I love. Everything that the body wants I have; and you or some of your attendants have supplied me with books and music; but it is in such a situation as this, your majesty, that one learns that the heart requires food as well as the body or the mind."

"The heart!" replied Catharine de Medicis, thoughtfully. "I once knew what the heart was, and I have not quite forgotten it yet. Did you mark my words after you had sung, Monsieur de Logères?"

"You were pleased to praise my poor singing much more than it deserved, madam," replied the young count.

"Something more than that, my good youth," replied the queen. "I told you that it had given more pleasure than you knew of. I might have added, that it gave pleasure to more than you knew of, for there was another ear could hear it besides mine."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the count, gazing eagerly in the queen's face; "and, pray, who might that be?"

"One that loves you," replied Catharine de Medicis. "One that loves you very well, Monsieur de Logères." And, rising from her chair, she put her hand to her brow, as if in deep thought. "Well," she said at length, "something must be risked, and I will risk something for that purpose. The time is not far distant, Monsieur de Logères—I see it clearly—when by some means you

will be set at liberty ; but, notwithstanding that, it may be long before you find such a thing even as an hour's happiness. You are a frank and generous man, I believe ; you will not take advantage of an act of kindness to behave ungenerously. I go away from you for a moment or two, and leave that door open behind me, trusting to your honour."

She waited for no reply, but quitted the room ; and Charles of Montsoreau stood gazing upon the door, doubtful of what was her meaning, and how he was to act. Some of her words might be interpreted as a hint to escape ; but others had directly a contrary tendency, and a moment after he heard her unlock and pass another door, and close but not lock it behind her.

CHAPTER VI.

"What is her meaning?" demanded Charles of Montsoreau, as he gazed earnestly upon the door ; and, as he thus thought, his heart beat vehemently, for there was a hope in it which he would not suffer his reason to rest upon for a moment, so improbable did it seem, and so fearful would be disappointment. "What is her meaning?" And he still asked himself the question, as one minute flew by after another, and to his impatience it seemed long ere she returned.

But a few minutes elapsed, however, in reality, ere there were steps heard coming back, and in another minute Catharine de Medicis again appeared, saying, "For one hour, remember ! For one hour only !"

There was somebody behind her, and the brightest hope that Charles of Montsoreau had dared to entertain was fully realized.

The queen had drawn Marie de Clairvaux forward ; and, passing out again, she closed the door, leaving her alone with her lover. If his heart had wanted any confirmation of the deep, earnest, overpowering affection which she entertained towards him, it might have been found in the manner in which—apparently without the power even to move forward, trembling, gasping for breath—she stood before him on so suddenly seeing

him again, without having been forewarned, after long, and painful, and anxious absence. As he had himself acknowledged, he was ignorant in the heart of woman; but love had been a mighty instructor, and he now needed no explanation of the agitation that he beheld.

Starting instantly forward, he threw his arms around her; and it was then, held to his bosom, pressed to his heart, that all Marie de Clairvaut's love and tenderness burst forth. Gentle, timid, modest in her own nature as she was, love and joy triumphed over all. The agony of mind she had been made to suffer was greater than even he could fancy, and the relief of that moment swept away all other thoughts: the tears, the happy but agitated tears, flowed rapidly from her eyes; but her lips sought his cheek from time to time, her arms clasped tenderly round him, and, as soon as she could speak, she said, "Oh Charles, Charles, do I see you again! Am I, am I held in your arms once more; the only one that I have ever loved in life, my saviour, my protector, my defender. For days, for weeks, I have not known whether you were living or dead. They had the cruelty, they had the barbarity not even to let me know whether you had or had not escaped the plague. They have kept me in utter ignorance of where you were, of all and of everything concerning you." And again she kissed his cheek; though, even while she did so, under the overpowering emotions of her heart, the blush of shame came up into her own: and then she hid her eyes upon his bosom, and wept once more in agitation but in happiness.

"As they have acted to you, dearest Marie," he replied, "as they have acted to you, so they have acted to me. The day they separated me from you at Epernon was the last day that I have spoken with any living creature up to this morning. No answers have been returned to my questions; not a word of intelligence could I obtain concerning your fate; and oh, dear, dear Marie, you would feel, you would know how terrible has been that state to me, if you could tell how ardently, how deeply, how passionately I love you." And his lips met hers, and sealed the assurance there.

"I know it, I know it all, Charles," replied Marie. "I know it by what I have felt; I know it by what I feel myself; for I believe, I do believe from my very heart, that if it be possible for two people to feel exactly alike, we so feel."

"But tell me, dear Marie, tell me," exclaimed her lover, "tell me where you have been. Have they treated you kindly? Does the Duke of Guise know where you are?"

"Alas, no, Charles!" replied Marie de Clairvaut; "he does not, I grieve to say. Well treated, indeed, I may say that I have been, for all that could contribute to my mere comfort has been done for me. Nothing that I could desire or wish for, Charles, has been ungiven, and I have ever had the society of the good sisters in the neighbouring convent. But the society that I love has of course been denied me; and no news, no tidings of any kind have reached me. I have lived, in short, with numbers of people surrounding me, as if I were not in the world at all: and the moment that I asked a question, a deep silence fell upon every one, and I could obtain no reply."

"This is strange indeed," said Charles, "very strange. However, we must be grateful that our treatment has been kind indeed in some respects."

"Oh, and most grateful," replied Marie de Clairvaut, "for these bright moments of happiness. Do you not think, Charles, do you not think that perhaps the queen may kindly grant us such interviews again?"

Who is there that does not know how lovers while away the time? Who is there that has not known how short is a lover's hour? But with Charles of Montsoreau and Marie de Clairvaut that hour seemed shorter than it otherwise would have done; for it was not alone the endearing caress, the words, the acknowledgments, the hopes of love, but they had a thousand things in the past to tell each other; they had cares and fears, and plans and purposes for the future to communicate.

Even had not all shyness, all timidity been done away before, that was not a moment in which Marie de Clairvaut could have affected aught towards her lover; so that what between tidings of the past and thoughts of the future, and the dear dalliance of that spendthrift of invaluable moments, love, an envious clock in some church-tower hard by had marked the arrival of the last quarter of an hour they were to remain together ere one tenth part of what they had to think of or to say was either thought or said. The sound startled them, and it became a choice whether they should give up the brief remaining space to serious thoughts of the future,

or whether they should yield it all to love. Who is it with such a choice before him that ever hesitated long?

The space allotted for their interview had drawn near its close, and the very scantiness of the period that remained was causing them to spend it in regrets that it was not longer, when suddenly the general sounds which came from the streets became louder and more loud, as if some door or gate had been opened which admitted the noise more distinctly. Both Marie de Clairvaut and her lover listened, and almost at the same instant loud cries were heard of "The Duke of Guise! The Duke of Guise! Long live the Duke of Guise! Long live the great pillar of the Catholic church! Long live the House of Lorraine!" And this was followed by the noise and trampling of horses, as if entering into a court below.

Marie and her lover gazed in each other's faces, but she it was that first spoke the joyful hopes that were in the heart of both.

"He has come to deliver us!" she cried. "Oh, Charles, he has come to deliver us! Hear how gladly the people shout his well-loved name! Surely they will not deceive him, and tell him we are not here."

"Oh no, dear Marie," replied her lover; "he has certain information, depend upon it, and will not be easily deceived. He has already discovered my abode, dear Marie; and this letter was thrown through the window this morning, though I myself know not where we are; that is to say, I am well aware that we are now in Paris, but I know not in what part of the city."

"Oh, that I discovered from one of the nuns," replied Marie. "We are at the house of the Black Penitents, in the Rue St. Denis. I remember the outside of it well; a large dark building, with only two windows to the street. Do you not remember it? You must have seen it in passing."

"I am not so well acquainted with the city as you are, dear Marie," replied Charles of Montsoreau; "but, depend upon it, where they have confined me is not in the house of the Black Penitents. It would be a violation of the rules of the order, which could not be."

"It communicates with their dwelling," replied Marie de Clairvaut; "of that at least I am certain; for the queen, when she brought me hither, took me not into the open air. She led me, indeed, through numerous

passages, one of which, some ten or twelve yards in length, was nearly dark, for it had no windows, and was only lighted by the door left open behind us. I was then placed in a little room while the queen went on, and a short time after I heard a voice, that made my heart beat strangely, begin to sing a song that you once sung at Montsoreau; and when I was thinking of you, Charles, and all that you had done for me; how you had first saved me from the reiters, and then rescued me from the deep stream, and had then come to seek me and deliver me in the midst of death and pestilence; I was thinking of all these things when Catharine came back, and, without telling me what was her intention, led me hither."

"Hark," cried Charles of Montsoreau. "They shout again. I wonder that we have heard no farther tidings."

And they both sat and listened for some minutes, but no indication of any farther event took place, and they gradually resumed their conversation, beginning in a low tone, as if afraid of losing a sound from without. Marie de Clairvaut had already told her lover how she had remained at Epernon for a day or two under the protection of the wife of the duke, and had been thence brought by her to Paris, and placed in the convent at a late hour of the evening; but, as the time wore away, and their hopes of liberation did not seem about to be realized, she recurred to the subject of her arrival, saying, "There is one thing which makes me almost fear they will deceive him, Charles. I forgot to tell you that, as we paused before this building on the night that I was brought hither, while the gates were being opened by the portress, a horseman rode up to the side of the carriage and gazed in. There were torches on the other side held by the servants round the gate, and though I could not see that horseman as well as he could see me, yet I feel almost sure that it was the face of the Abbé de Boisguerin I beheld."

"I know he was to return to Paris," said Charles of Montsoreau, "after accompanying my brother some part of the way back to the chateau. But fear not him, dear Marie; he has no power or influence here."

"Oh, but I fear far more wile and intrigue," cried Marie de Clairvaut, "than I do power and influence, Charles. Power is like a lion, bold and open; but, when

once satisfied, injures little; but art is like a serpent, that stings us, without cause, when we least expect it. But hark!" she continued again. "They are once more shouting loudly."

Charles of Montsoreau listened also, and the cries, repeated again and again, of "Long live the Duke of Guise! Long live the House of Lorraine! Long live the good Queen Catharine!" Life to the queen! Life to the queen!" were heard mingled with thundering huzzas and acclamations. The heart of the young count sank, for he judged that the duke had gone forth again among the people, and had either forgotten his fate altogether in more important affairs, or had been deceived by false information regarding himself and Mademoiselle de Clairvaut.

The cries, which were at first loud and distinct, gradually sunk, till first the words could no longer be distinguished; then the acclamations became more and more faint, till the whole died away into a distant murmur, rising and falling like the sound of the sea beating upon a stormy shore. The young count gazed in the countenance of Marie de Clairvaut, and saw therein written even more despairing feelings than were in his own heart.

"Fear not, dear Marie," he said, pressing her to his bosom. "Fear not; the duke must know that I am here by this letter; nor is he one to be easily deceived. Depend upon it, he will find means to deliver us ere long."

Marie de Clairvaut shook her head with a deep sigh and with her eyes filled with tears. But she had not time to reply, for steps were heard in the passage, and the moment after the door of the room was opened.

It was no longer, however, the figure of Catharine de Medicis that presented itself, but the homely person and somewhat unmeaning face of a good lady, dressed in the habit of a prioress. Behind her, again, was a lay-sister, and beside them both the attendant who was accustomed to wait upon the young count. The good lady who first appeared looked round the scene that the opening door

* The progress of the Duke of Guise and the queen-mother, from the convent of the Penitents to the Louvre, was in triumph. "Il y en avoit," says Auvigny, "qui se mettoient à genoux devant lui, d'autres lui baisoient les mains; quelques uns se trouvoient trop heureux de pouvoir en passant toucher son habit." A farther account of this famous event is given a few pages farther on.

disclosed to her, with evident marks of curiosity and surprise; and, indeed, the whole expression of her countenance left little doubt that she had never been in that place before.

After giving up a minute to her curiosity, however, she turned to Mademoiselle de Clairvaut, saying, "I have been sent by the queen, madam, to conduct you back to your apartments."

"Let me first ask one question," replied Marie de Clairvaut. "Has not the Duke of Guise been here?"

The nun answered not a word.

"We need no assurance of it, dear Marie," said Charles of Montsoreau, hoping to drive the prioress to some answer. "We know that he has, and must have been deceived in regard to your state and mine."

The prioress was still silent; and Marie de Clairvaut, after waiting for a moment, added, "If he have been deceived, Charles, we to those who have deceived him. He is not a man to pass over lightly such conduct as has been shown to me already."

"Madame," said the prioress, "I have been sent by the queen to show you to your apartments."

It was in vain to resist or to linger. Marie de Clairvaut gave her hand to her lover, and they gazed in each other's faces for a moment with a long and anxious glance, not knowing when they might meet again. Charles of Montsoreau could not resist; and, notwithstanding the presence of nun, prioress, and attendant, he drew the fair creature whose hand he held in his gently to his bosom, and pressed a parting kiss upon her lips.

Marie turned away with her eyes full of tears, and leaving her hand in his till the last moment, she slowly approached the door. She turned for one other look ere she departed, and then, dashing the tears from her eyes, passed rapidly out. The door closed behind her, and Charles of Montsoreau alone, and almost without hope, buried his face in his hands, and gave himself up to think over the sweet moments of the past.

CHAPTER VII.

It was on the morning of Monday, the 9th of May, 1588, at about half past eleven o'clock, that a party, consisting of sixteen horsemen, of whom eight were gentlemen and the rest grooms, appeared at the gates of Paris. But though each of those eight persons who led the cavalcade were strong and powerful men, in the prime of life, highly educated, and generally distinguished in appearance, yet there was one on whom all eyes rested wherever he passed, and rested with that degree of wonder and admiration which might be well called forth by the union of the most perfect graces of person, with the appearance of the greatest vigour and activity, and with a dignity and beauty of expression which breathed not only from the countenance, but from the whole person, and shone out in every movement, as well as in every look.

The gates of the city were at this time open; and though a certain number of guards were hanging about the buildings on either hand, yet no questions were asked of any one who came in or went out of the city. The moment, however, that the party we have mentioned appeared, and he who was at its head paused for a moment on the inside of the gate and gazed round, as if looking for some one that he expected to see there, one of the by-standers whispered eagerly to the other, "It is the duke! It is the Duke of Guise!"

All hats were off in a moment; all voices cried, "The duke! The duke!" A loud acclamation ran round the gate, and the people from the small houses in the neighbourhood poured forth at the sound, rending the air with their acclamations, and pressing forward round his horse with such eagerness that it was scarcely possible for him to pass along his way. Some kissed his hand, some threw themselves upon their knees before him, some satisfied themselves by merely touching his cloak, as if it had saintly virtue in it, and still the cry ran on of "The Duke of Guise! The Duke of Guise! Long live the Duke of Guise!" while every doorway, and alley, and courtyard poured forth its multitudes, till the

people seemed literally to crush each other in the streets, and all Paris echoed with the thundering acclamations.

After that momentary pause at the gates, the Duke of Guise rode on, uncovering his splendid head, and bowing lowly to the people as he went. His face had been flushed by exercise when he arrived, but now the deep excitement of such a reception had taken the colour from his cheek; he was somewhat pale, and his lip quivered with intense feeling. But there was a fire in his eye which seemed to speak that his heart was conscious of great purposes, and ready to fulfil its high enterprise; and there was a degree of stern determination on that lordly brow, which spoke also the knowledge, but the contempt of danger, and the resolution of meeting peril and overcoming resistance.

Thus passing on amid the people, and bowing as he went to their repeated cheers, the Duke of Guise reached the convent of the Black Penitents, where, for the time, the queen-mother had taken up her abode. The gates of the outer court, into which men were suffered to enter, were thrown open to admit him; and signifying to such of the crowd as were nearest to the gate that they had better not follow him into the court, the Duke of Guise rode in with his attendants, and the gates were again closed. The servants and the gentlemen who accompanied him remained beside their horses in the court, while he alone entered the parlour of the convent to speak with the queen-mother.

She did not detain him an instant, but came in with a countenance on which much alarm was painted, either by nature or by art. The duke at once advanced to meet her, and, bending low his towering head, he kissed the hand which she held out to him.

"Alas! my Lord of Guise," she said, "I must not so far falsify the truth as to say that I am glad to see you. Glad, most glad should I have been to see you anywhere but here. But, alas! I fear you have come at great peril to yourself, good cousin! You know not how angry the minds of men are; you know not how much hostility reigns against you in the breasts of many of the highest of the land; you have not bethought you, that on every step to the throne there stands an enemy—"

"Who shall fall before me, madam," replied the Duke of Guise.

"Till you have reached the throne itself, fair cousin!" said the queen-mother.

"No, madam, no," answered the Duke of Guise, eagerly. "I thought your majesty had known me better. I have always believed that you were one of those who felt and understood that I never dreamed of wronging my master and my king, or of snatching, as you now hinted, the crown from its lawful possessor."

"I have felt it, and I have understood it, cousin of Guise," replied Catharine de Medicis. "But, alas! my lord, I know how ambition grows upon the heart. It begins with an acorn, Guise, but it ends with an oak. Those that watch it, the very soil that bears it, perceive not its increase; and yet it soon overshadows all things, and root it out who can!"

"Madam," answered the Duke of Guise, boldly, "to follow the figure that you have used, the axe soon reduces the oak; and may the axe be used on me, and ease me of earth's ambition for ever, if any such designs as have been attributed to me exist within my bosom! You see, madam, I meet you boldly, look to ultimate consequences of ambitious designs, and fear not the result. It is such accusations that I come to repel, and it is those who have propagated them, and instilled them both into the mind of his majesty, and, as it would appear, your own, that I come to punish. Trusting that, humble though I be, your majesty was the best friend I had at the court of France, I have ridden straight hither, without even stopping at my own abode, to beseech you to accompany me to the presence of the king."

"I do believe, cousin of Guise, that I am your best friend at the court of France," replied the princess. "In fact, I may say, I know that none there loves you but myself. Nor must you think that I accuse you of actual ambition, or believe the rumours that have been circulated against you. I merely wish to warn you of the growth of such things in your own bosom."

"Dear madam," replied the duke, "had I been ambitious, what might I not have become! Here am I simply the Duke of Guise; a poor officer, commanding part of the king's troops, and contributing no small part of my own to swell his forces; with scarcely a place, a post, a government, an emolument, or a revenue, except

what I derive from my own estates. Am I the most ambitious man in France? Am I so ambitious as he who adds, to the government of Mentz, the government of Normandy, and piles upon that Touraine, Anjou, Saintonge, the Angoumois, seizes upon the office of high-admiral, creates himself colonel-general of the infantry? This, lady, is the ambitious man; but of him you seem to entertain no fear."

"There are two ambitions, my lord duke," replied the queen: "the ambition which grasps at power, and the ambition which snatches at wealth: the moment that ambition mingles itself with avarice, the grovelling passion, chained in its own sordid bonds, is no longer to be feared. It is where the object is power; where there is a mind to conceive the means, and a heart to dare all the risks, that there is indeed occasion for apprehension and for precaution. Still, my lord, I believe you; still I believe that the hand of Guise will never be raised to pull down the bonnet of Valois. You may strip the minion Epernon of the golden plumes with which he has decked his mid-air wings, for aught I care or think of; you may cast down the dark and plotting Villequier, and sweep the court of apes and parrots, fools and villains, and the whole tribe of natural and human beasts, without my saying one word to oppose you, or without my dreaming for a moment that you aim at higher things; you may even soar higher still, and, like your great father, become at once the guide and the defender of the state, and still I will not fear you. But, Guise," she added, in a softer tone, "I must and will still fear *for* you; and though I will go with you to the king if you continue to demand it, yet I tell you, and I warn you, that every step you take is perilous, and that I cannot be your safeguard nor your surety for a moment!"

"Madame, I must fulfil my fate," replied the Duke of Guise, looking up. "I came here to justify myself; I came here to deliver and to support my friends; I came here to secure honour and safety to the Catholic Church; and did I know that the daggers of a hundred assassins would be in my bosom at the first step I took beyond those gates, I would go forth as resolutely as I came hither."

"Then I must send to announce your coming to the

king," said the queen. "Of course I cannot take you to the Louvre unannounced."

Thus saying, she quitted the room for a moment, and the duke remained behind, with his arms crossed upon his bosom in deep thought. She returned in a moment, however, saying that she had sent one of her gentlemen upon the errand; and the next minute, as the gates were opened for some one to go out, long and reiterated shouts of "A Guise! A Guise! Long live the Guise!" were heard echoing round the building.

Catharine de Medicis smiled and looked at the duke. "How often have I heard," she said, "those same light Parisian tongues exclaim the name of different princes! I remember well, Guise, when first I came from my fair native land, how the glad multitude shouted on my way; how all the streets were strewn with flowers; and how, if I had believed the words I heard, I should have fancied that not a man in all the land but would have died to serve me; and yet, not long after, I have heard execrations murmured in the throats of the dull multitude while I passed by, and the name of Diana of Poitiers echoed through the streets. Then, have I not heard the names of a Francis and a Henry shouted far and wide! and, after Jarnac and Moncontour, the heavens were scarcely high enough to hold the sounds of his name who now sits upon the throne of France. To-day it is Guise they call upon! Who shall it be to-morrow! And then another and another still shall come, the object of an hour's love changed into hatred in a moment."

"It is too true, madam," replied the duke. "Popularity is the most fleeting, the most vacillating—if you will, the most contemptible—of all those means and opportunities which Heaven gives us to be made use of for great ends. But, nevertheless, madam, we must so make use of them all; and as this same popularity is one of the briefest of the whole, so must we be the more ready, the more prompt, the more decided in taking advantage of the short hour of brightness. I may be wrong in thinking," he continued, after the pause of a moment or two, "I may be wrong in thinking that my well-being, and that of the state and church of this realm, are intimately bound up together. It may be, and probably is, a delusion of human vanity. Nevertheless, such being my opinion, none can say that I am

wrong in taking advantage of the moment of my popularity to do the best that I can both for the church and for the state. Such, I assure you, madam, is my object; and if I benefit myself at all in these transactions, it can be and shall be but collaterally; while, in the mean time, I incur perils which I know and yet fear not."

Thus went on the conversation between the queen and the Duke of Guise for nearly half an hour, at the end of which time the gentleman who had been despatched to the king returned, bearing his majesty's reply, which was, that, since his mother desired it, she might bring the Duke of Guise to his presence; and Catharine prepared immediately to set out. Her chair was brought round; and after speaking a few words with the superior of the convent, she placed herself in the vehicle, the Duke of Guise walking by her side. The gentlemen who had come with him gave their horses to the grooms, and followed on foot; and several servants and attendants ran on before to clear the way through the people.

The moment the gates were opened, a spectacle struck the eyes of the queen and the duke such as no city in the world perhaps, except Paris, could produce. In the short period which had elapsed since the duke's arrival, the news had spread from one end of the capital to the other, and the whole of its multitudes were poured out into the streets, or lining the windows, or crowning the house-tops. With a rapidity scarcely to be conceived, scaffoldings had been raised in that short space of time in different parts of the streets, to enable the multitude to see the duke better as he passed;* in many places, velvets and rich tapestries were hung out upon the fronts of the houses, as if some solemn procession of the church were taking place; the ladies of the higher classes, at the windows or on their scaffoldings, were generally without the masks which they usually wore in the streets; and again, when the gates of the convent opened, and the queen and the duke issued forth, the air seemed actually rent with the acclamations of the people, and a long line of waving hats and handkerchiefs was seen all the way up the Rue St. Denis.

* This fact is recorded in every account of the proceedings of that day.

The same gratulations as before met the duke on every side as he passed along; the populace seemed absolutely inclined to worship him, and many threw themselves upon their knees as he passed. He looked round upon the dense mass of people, upon the crowded houses, upon the waving hands; he heard from every tongue a welcome, at every step a gratulation, and it was impossible for the heart of man not to feel at that moment a pride and a confidence fit to bear him strongly on his perilous way.

All the way down the Rue St. Denis, and through every other street that he passed, the same scene presented itself, the same acclamations followed him, so that the shouts thundered in the ear of the king as he sat in the Louvre.

At length the queen and those who accompanied her approached the palace; and in the open space before it, which was at that time railed off, was drawn up a long double line of guards, forming a lane through which it was necessary to pass to the gates. The well-known Crillon, celebrated for his determination and bravery, was at their head; and the Duke of Guise, obliged to pause in order to suffer the chair of the queen-mother to pass on first, bowed to the commander, whom he knew and respected.

Crillon scarcely returned his salutation, but looked frowning along the double row of his soldiery. The people, close by the railings, watched every movement, and a murmur of something like apprehension for their favourite ran through them as they watched these signs. But not a moment's pause marked the slightest hesitation in the Duke of Guise. With his head raised and his eyes flashing, he drew forward the hilt of his unconquered sword ready for his hand, and holding the scabbard in his left, strode after the chair of the queen till the gates of the Louvre closed upon him and his train.

A number of officers and gentlemen were waiting in the vestibule to receive the queen-mother, who, however, gave her hand to the Duke of Guise to assist her from her chair. On him they gazed with eyes of wonder and of scrutiny, as if they would fain have discovered what feelings were in the heart of one so hated and dreaded by the king, at a moment when he stood with closed doors within a building filled with his enemies, and surrounded by soldiers ready to massacre

him at a word. But the fire which the menacing look of Crillon had brought into the eyes of the duke had now passed away, and all was calm dignity, and easy, though grave self-possession. The eye wandered not round the hall; the lip, though not compressed, was firm and motionless, except when he smiled in saluting some of those around whom he knew, or in speaking a few words to the queen-mother, whose dress had become somewhat entangled with a mantle of sables which she had worn in the chair.

As soon as it was detached, one of the officers of the household said, bowing low, "His majesty has commanded me, madam, to conduct you and his highness of Guise to the chamber of her majesty the queen, where he waits your coming." And he led the way up the stairs of the Louvre to the somewhat extraordinary audience chamber which the king had selected.

Henry, when the party entered, was sitting near the side of the bed, surrounded by several of his officers, one of whom, Alphonzo d'Ornano by name, whispered something over the king's shoulder with his eyes fixed upon the Duke of Guise.

The words, which were, "Do you hold him for your friend or your enemy?" were spoken in such a tone as almost to reach the duke himself. The king did not reply, but looked up at the duke with a frown that was quite sufficient.

"Speak but the word," said Ornano, in a lower tone, "speak but the word, and his head shall be at your feet in a minute."

The king measured Ornano and the Duke of Guise with his eyes, then shook his head with somewhat of a scornful smile; and then, looking up to the duke, who had by this time come near him, he said in a dull, heavy tone, "What brings you here, my cousin?"

"My lord," replied the duke, "I have found it absolutely necessary to present myself before your majesty, in order to repel numerous calumnies."

"Stay, cousin of Guise," said the king; and, turning to Bellievre, who stood among the persons behind him, he demanded abruptly, "Did you not tell me that he would not come to Paris?"

"My lord duke," exclaimed Bellievre, not replying directly to the king's question, but addressing the duke, "did not your highness assure me that you would delay your journey till I returned?"

"Yes, *Monsieur de Bellievre*," replied the duke. "But you did not return."

"But I wrote you two letters, your highness," replied *Bellievre*, "reiterating his majesty's commands for you not to come to Paris."

"Those letters," replied the Duke of Guise, with a bitter smile, "like some other letters which have been written to me upon important occasions, have, from some cause, failed to reach my hands. Nevertheless, sire, believe me when I tell you that my object in coming is solely to prove to your majesty that I am not guilty either of the crimes or the designs which base and grasping men have laid to my charge. Believe me, that, after my devotion to God and our holy religion, there is no one whom I am so anxious to serve zealously and devotedly as your majesty. This you will find ever, sire, if you will but give me the opportunity of rendering you any service."

The king was about to reply, but the queen-mother, who had advanced and stood by his side, touched his arm, saying, "You have not yet spoken to me, my son." And the king turning towards her, she added something in a low voice. The king replied in the same tone; and the Duke of Guise, passing through the midst of frowning faces ranged around the royal seat, approached the queen-consort, the mild and unhappy Louisa, and addressed a few words to her of reverence and respect which were gratifying to her ear.

He then turned once more to the king, who seemed to have heard what *Catharine de Medicis* had to say, and, having given his reply, sat in moody silence. The queen-mother stood by, with some degree of apprehension in her countenance, as if feeling very doubtful still how the affair would terminate. The brows of the courtiers were gloomy and undecided, and the few followers of the Duke of Guise, ranged at some distance from the spot to which he had now advanced, kept their eyes fixed either on him or on those surrounding the king, as if, at the least menacing movement, they were ready to start forward in defence of their leader.

The only one that was perfectly calm was Guise himself; but he, retreading his steps till he stood opposite the king, again addressed the monarch, saying, "I hope, sire, that you will give me a full opportunity of justifying myself."

"Your conduct, cousin of Guise," replied the king, "must best justify you for the past; and I shall judge by the event of your intentions for the future."

"Let it be so," replied the duke; "and, such being the case, I will humbly take my leave of your majesty, wishing you, from my heart, health and happiness."

Thus saying, he once more bowed low, and retired from the presence of the king, followed by the gentlemen who had accompanied him. Not an individual of the palace stirred a step to conduct him on his way, though his rank, his services, his genius, and his vast renown rendered the piece of neglect they showed disgraceful to themselves rather than injurious to him. He was accompanied from the gates of the Louvre, however, and followed to the Hôtel de Guise, by an infinite number of people, who ceased not for one moment to make the streets ring with their acclamations.

Nor were these by any means composed entirely of the lowest classes of the people, the least respectable, or the least well-informed. On the contrary, it must, alas! be said, that the great majority of all that was good, upright, and noble in the city hailed his coming loudly as a security and a safeguard.

A number, an immense number, of the inferior nobility of the realm, were mingled with the crowd that followed him, or joined the acclaim from the windows. The robes of the law were seen continually in the dense multitude; and almost all the courts had there numbers of their principal members; while the municipal officers of the city, with the exception of two or three, were there in a mass, accompanied by a large body of the most opulent and respectable merchants.

Thus followed, the Duke of Guise proceeded to his hotel on foot as he came, speaking from time to time with those who pressed near him with that peculiar grace which won all hearts, and smiling with the far-famed smile of his race, which was said never to fall upon any man without making him feel as if he stood in the sunshine.

Already collected on the steps of the Hôtel de Guise, at the news that he was returning from the Louvre, was a group of the brightest, the bravest, the most talented, and the most beautiful of the French nobility: Madame de Montpensier, Mademoiselle de St. Beuve, the Chevalier d'Aumale, Brissac, and a thousand

others. The servants and attendants of his household, in gorgeous dresses, kept back the crowd with courteous words and kindly gestures; and when he reached the steps that led to the high doorway of the porter's lodge, on the right of the porte cochère, he ascended a little way among his gratulating friends, and then turned and bowed repeatedly to the people, pointing out here and there some of the most popular of the citizens and magistrates, and whispering a word to the nearest attendant, who instantly made his way through the crowd to the spot where the personage designated stood, and in his master's name requested that he would come in and take some refreshment.

When this was over, he again bowed and retired; and, while the multitude separated, he walked on into his lordly halls with a number of persons clinging round him, whom he had not seen for months; for months which to him had been full of activity, thought, care, and peril, and to them of anxiety for the head of their race.

As he passed along, however, to a chamber where the dinner which had been prepared for him had remained untouched for many an hour, his eye fell upon a boy dressed in the habit of one of his own pages; and, taking suddenly a step forward, he called the boy apart into a window, demanding eagerly, "Well, have you found your master?"

"I have, your highness," replied the boy, "and have found means to give him the letter!"

"What!" exclaimed the duke, "outwitted Villequier, and Pisani, and all! The wit of a page against that of a politician for a thousand crowns!"

"I dressed myself as a girl, your highness," replied the boy, "and got into the convent, and then through a gate into what is called the rector's court, where Doctor Botholph and the curé live, and where men are admitted, and women not shut out when they like to go in; and I got talking to the old verger of the church by the side, and he called me a pretty little fool, and said he dared to say I would soon be among the penitents within there; and with that I got him to tell me everything, and the whole story of the young count being brought there at night, and shut up in what are called the rector's apartments."

As he spoke, one or two of the higher class of those

whom the duke had selected from the crowd below, and who felt themselves privileged to present themselves in his private apartments, entered the hall, and instantly caught his eye.

"I cannot speak with you more at present, Ignati," he said, "nor, perhaps, during the whole day, for there is business of life and death before me; but come to me while I am rising to-morrow, and only tell me in the mean time where our poor Logères is, for I know not what convent you mean."

"He is in the rector's court," replied the boy, "close by the convent of the Black Penitents, in the Rue St Denis."

"By my faith!" exclaimed the duke, in no slight surprise, "I have been there this very day myself, and there the queen-mother has made her abode for the last ten days. She must be deceiving me; and yet, perhaps, the mighty matters that occupied her mind when I saw her might have made her forget all other things. However, Logères shall not be long so fettered. Come to me to-morrow, Ignati; come to me to-morrow, as I am rising; and, in the mean time, if you can find some means of giving the count intimation that he is not forgotten, it were all the better."

"I will try, my lord," replied the boy. And the duke hurried on to welcome his new guests, making them sit down at table with him, and covering them with every sort of honour and distinction.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN our dealings with each other there is nothing which we so much miscalculate as the ever-varying value of time; and, indeed, it is but too natural to look upon it as it seems to us, and not as it seems to others. The slow idler, on whose head it hangs heavy, holds the man of business by the button, and remorselessly robs him on the king's highway of a thing ten times more valuable than the purse that would hang him if he took it. The man of action and of business, whose days seem but moments, forgets, in his dealing with the

long expecting applicant and the weary petitioner, that to them each moment is far longer than his day.

The hours, not one minute of which were unfilled to the Duke of Guise, passed slowly over the head of Charles of Montsoreau; and it seemed as if the brief gleam of happiness which had come across his path had but tended to make the long solitary moments seem longer and more dreary; in fact, to give full and painful effect to solitude and want of liberty, and yet he would not have lost that gleam for all the world.

He thought of it, he dwelt upon it, he called to mind each and every particular; and though it was crossed, as the memory of all such brief meetings are, with the recollection of a thousand things which he could have wished to have said, but which he had forgotten, and also by many a speculation of a painful kind concerning the visit of the Duke of Guise to the very place in which he was confined, without the slightest effort being made for his liberation, yet it was a consolation, and a happiness, and a joy to him; one of those blessings which have been stamped by the past with the irrevocable seal of enjoyment, which are our own, the unalienable jewels of our fate, held for ever in the treasury of memory.

Nothing occurred through the rest of the day to call his attention or to rouse his feelings. He heard the distant murmur and the shouts of the people from time to time; but the gates were now shut, and the sounds dull, and all passed on evenly till darkness shut up the world. In the mean time he knew—as if to make his state of imprisonment and inactivity more intolerable—that busy actions were taking place without; that his own fate was deciding by the hands of others; that his happiness and that of Marie de Clairvaut formed but a small matter in the great bulk of political affairs which were then being weighed between the two angry parties in the capital, and might be tossed into this scale or that, as accident, or convenience, or policy might direct.

Though he retired to rest as usual, he slept not; and ever and anon, when a sort of half slumber fell upon his eyes, he started up, thinking he heard some sound, a distant shout of the people, the tolling of a bell, or the roll of some far-off drum. Nothing, however, occurred, and the night passed over as the day.

In the gray of the morning, however, just when the slow creaking of a gate, or the noise of footsteps here

and there breaking the previous stillness, told that the world was beginning to awake, a few sweet notes suddenly met his ear like those of a musical instrument, and in a moment after he heard the same air which the boy Ignati had played with such exquisite skill just before he freed him from his Italian masters.

"A blessing be upon that boy," he cried, as he instantly recognised not only the sounds, but the touch. "He has come to tell me that I am not forgotten."

Suddenly, however, before the air was half concluded, the music stopped, and voices were heard speaking, but not so loud that the words could be distinguished. It seemed to the young count, and seemed truly, that some one had sent the boy away; but, though he heard no more, those very sounds had given him hope and comfort.

Driven away by the old verger, who had now discovered the trick which had been put upon him the day before, the boy returned with all speed to the Hôtel de Guise, and, according to the duke's order, presented himself in his chamber at the hour of his rising. But the duke was already surrounded with people, all eager to speak with him on different affairs, and his brow was evidently dark and clouded by some news that he had just heard.

"Send round," he was saying, as the boy entered, "send round speedily to all the inns, and let those who are known for their fidelity be informed that the doors of this hotel will never be shut against any of those who have come to Paris for my service or for that of the church, as long as there is a chamber vacant within. And you, my good lords," he continued, turning to some of the gentlemen who surrounded him, "I must call upon your hospitality also, to provide lodgings for these poor friends of ours, whom this new and iniquitous proceeding of the court is likely to drive from Paris. But stay, Bussi," he continued, and his eye fell upon the page as he spoke; "you say you saw the Prévôt des Marchands but a minute ago in the Rue d'Anvoys seeking out the lodgers in the inns, and ordering them to quit Paris immediately. Hasten down after him quickly, and tell him from Henry of Guise that there is a very dangerous prisoner and a zealous servant of the church lodged in the Rue St. Denis; that he had better drive him forth also; and that, if he wants direction to the

place where he sojourns, one of my pages shall lead him thither. You may add, moreover, that if he do not drive him forth, I will bring him forth before the world be a day older."

The Duke of Guise then took the pen from the ink which was standing before him, and, though not yet half dressed, wrote hastily the few following words to the queen-mother :

"MADAM,

"I am informed, on authority which I cannot doubt, that my friend, the young Count de Logères, is at present in your hands, kept under restraint in the Rue St. Denis, after having been arrested in the execution of business with which I charged him, while bearing a passport from the king. I beseech you to set him immediately at liberty, and also at once to order that my niece and ward, Mademoiselle de Clairvaut, be brought to the Hôtel de Guise without an hour's delay. Let me protest to your majesty that you have not a more faithful and devoted servant than

"HENRY OF GUISE."

"I will not send this by you, Ignati," said the duke; "they would laugh at a boy. Here, Mestroit, bear this to the queen-mother. Say I cast myself at her feet; and bring me back an answer without delay. Why, how now, St. Paul!" he continued, turning to a gentleman who had just entered. "Your brow is as dark as a thunder-cloud. What has happened now? Shall we be obliged to make our hotel our fortress, and defend it to the last, like gallant men?"

"Not so, my lord," replied the Count of St. Paul; "not near so bad as that: but still these are times that make men look thoughtful; and, depend upon it, the king, aided by his minions and the Politics,* is seeking to enclose your highness in a net."

"We will break through, St. Paul! We will break through!" replied the duke, with a smile. "But what are your tidings?"

"Why, that orders have been sent to the Swiss to come up from Corbeil, as well as those from Meulan

* That party was so called which affected to hold the balance between the Court and the League, without giving countenance to the Huguenots.

and Chateau Thierry; also the companies of French guards from every quarter in the neighbourhood are called for, and I myself saw come in, by the Faubourg St. Germain, a body of two hundred horse, which, upon inquiry, I found to be a new levy from some place in the South, led by a young Marquis of Montsoreau, whose name I never heard of before."

"Whenever you hear it again, St. Paul," replied the duke, sternly, "couple with it the word 'Traitor!' and you will do him justice. But what force is it said they are bringing into Paris? What stay you for, Mestroit?" he continued, seeing that the gentleman to whom he had given the letter had not taken his departure. "What stay you for? I would have had you there now. Go with all speed! There are horses enough saddled in the court. I would give a thousand crowns that letter should be in the queen's hand before this youth's coming is known to her. It may save us much trouble hereafter. Fail not to bring me an answer quick. Now, St. Paul, how many men say you, on your best judgment, are they bringing into Paris?"

"Why, your highness," replied the count, "some say ten thousand; but, to judge more moderately from what I hear, the moment your highness's arrival in Paris was known, orders were sent for the march of full seven thousand men."

"We must be very formidable creatures, Brissac," cried the duke, "that my coming with seven of you should need seven thousand men to meet us. On my soul, they will make me think myself a giant. I always thought I was a tall man—some six foot three, I believe—but, by Heavens! I must be a Gargantua, indeed, to need seven thousand men to hold me. Seven thousand men!" he added, thoughtfully: "he has not got them, St. Paul. There are not five thousand within fifty miles of Paris, unless Epernon and Villequier have contrived to raise more of such Montsoreaus against us. However, we must have eyes in all quarters. Send out parties to watch the coming of the troops, and give us their numbers. Let some one speak to the inferior officers of the French Guards, and remind them that the Duke of Guise and the Holy League are only striving for the maintenance of the true faith, and for the overthrow of those minions who have swallowed up all the honours and favours of the crown. It

were well, also, Brissac, that a good watch were kept upon the proceedings in the city. I can trust, methinks, to The Sixteen to do all that is necessary in their different quarters, and to make full reports of all that takes place; but still a military eye were as well here and there, from time to time, Brissac, and I will trust that to you."

The rest of the morning passed in the same incessant activity with which it had begun; tidings were constantly brought in from all parts of the town and the country round concerning every movement on the part of the court; and the hotel of the Duc de Guise was literally besieged by his followers and partisans. Train after train of noblemen and officers, of lawyers and citizens, followed each other during the whole day, each bringing him information, or claiming audience on some account. Nor were the clergy less numerous; for scarce a parish in the capital but sent forth, in the course of that day, its train of priests and monks to congratulate him on his arrival, or to beseech him to hold up the tottering church of France with a strong hand.

At the same time, the order which had been given by the king in the morning, for every stranger not domiciled in Paris to quit it within six hours, and the proceedings of the *Prévôt des Marchands* to execute that order, had—by driving out of the inns and taverns the multitudes of the duke's partisans who had followed him in scattered bodies into Paris—now filled the *Hôtel de Guise* with all those of the higher classes who were thus expelled. The houses of other members of the faction received the rest. But the stables of the hotel were all filled to the doors; the great court itself could scarcely be crossed, on account of the number of horses; and more than once the street became impassable from the multitude of carriages, chairs, horses, and attendants, who were waiting while their masters conferred with the duke.

It was near midday when the gentleman who had been despatched to Catharine de Medicis again presented himself; and the duke demanded, somewhat impatiently, what had detained him so long.

"It was the queen-mother, your highness," replied Mestroit. "More than an hour passed before I could obtain an audience; and when I was admitted to present your highness's letter, I found Monsieur de Villequier with her."

"Did she show the letter to that son of Satan?" demanded the duke.

"No, sir," replied the other; "on the contrary, she seemed not to wish that he should see it, for she kept it tight in her hand after she had read it, and told me to wait a moment, that she would give me an answer directly."

"I would sooner unriddle the enigma of the sphinx," said the duke, "than I would say from what motive any one of that woman's acts proceed; and yet she has a great mind, and a heart not altogether so vicious as it seems. What happened then, Mestroit?"

"Why, my lord, Villequier seemed anxious to know what the letter contained, and I saw his head a little raised, and his eyes turned quietly towards it while she was reading, as I have seen a cat regard a mousehole towards which she was stealing upon tiptoes; and he lingered long, and seemed inclined to stay. The queen, however, begged him not to forget the orders she had given, but to execute them instantly; and he then went away. When he was gone, the queen again read your highness's letter, and replied at first, 'The duke asks what is not in my power. Tell my noble cousin of Guise that he has been misinformed; that I hold none of his friends in my power.' Then, after a moment, she bade me wait, and she would see what persuasion would do!"

"She must not think to deceive me!" replied the Duke of Guise. "But what more?"

"She went away," replied the gentleman, "and was absent for full two hours, leaving me there alone, with nothing to amuse me but the pages and serving women, that came and looked at me from time to time as at a tiger in a cage. At length she came back, and bade me tell your highness these exact words: 'My cousin has been misinformed. I have none of his people in my hands or in my power. The Count of Logères, however, shall be set free before eight-and-forty hours are over. He may be set free to-morrow; but, by leaving him for a few hours more where he is, I trust to accomplish for the duke that which he demands concerning his ward, although I have no power whatever in the matter.'"

"There is nothing upon earth," said the duke, thoughtfully, "so convenient as to have the reality without the

name of power. We have the pleasure without the reproach! Catharine de Medicis has not the power! Who then has? I may have the power also, it is true, to right myself and those who attach themselves to me; and in this instance I will use it. But still it were better to wait the time she states; for I know her fair majesty well, and she never yields anything without a delay, to make what she grants seem more important: and yet, the day after to-morrow—the day after to-morrow—who shall say what may be ere the day after to-morrow comes? This head may be lowly in the dust ere then."

"Or circled with the crown of France," said the Count de St. Paul.

"God forbid!" exclaimed the duke, earnestly. "If I thought that it would ever produce a scheme to wrest the sceptre from the line that rightfully holds it, I would bear it to-morrow to the foot of the throne myself, as my own accuser. No, no! bad kings may die or be deposed: but there is still some one on whose brow the crown descends by right. And let him have it."

"The Cardinal of Bourbon, your highness," said an attendant, entering, "has just arrived from Seissons. His eminence is upon the stairs coming up."

A smile played over the lips of most of the persons present at such an announcement at that moment, for every one well knew that it was to the old Cardinal de Bourbon that the party of the League looked as the successor to the crown on the death of Henry III., to the exclusion of the direct line of Navarre, held to be incapable of succeeding on account of religion. The duke, however, advanced immediately with open arms to meet the cardinal, and many hours were passed in long conferences between them and the principal officers and supporters of the League.

At the end of that time, however, towards even o'clock, a message was brought into the room where they were in consultation, from Monsieur de Sainctyon, a well-known adherent of the League, begging earnestly to speak with the duke upon matters of deep importance. On the duke going out, he found the worthy Leaguer in a state of great excitement and agitation.

"My lord," he said, as soon as Guise appeared in the room where he had been left alone, "I fear that they

are busily labouring at the palace for the destruction of your highness and of the Holy League."

"How so, Monsieur de Sainctyon?" demanded the duke, who entertained doubts, it seems, of the Leaguer's sincerity, which were never wholly removed. "Some of my friends have just returned from the palace, who tell me that all is as still and as quiet as the inside of a vault."

"They told your highness also, I hope," said the Leaguer, "that they had trebled the guard, both Swiss and French."

"Yes, I was informed of that," replied the duke. "But that shows fear, not daring, Monsieur de Sainctyon."

"Perhaps so, my lord," replied Sainctyon, who was one of the *échevins* or sheriffs of the town; "but perhaps not. However, what I have now to tell shows more daring than fear. We were summoned this afternoon at five o'clock to the *Hôtel de Ville*, where we found not only *Pereuse*, the *prévôt*, and *Le Comte*, who is worse than a *Politie*, and half a *Huguenot*, but the *Marquis d'O*——."

"Who is worse," said the Duke of Guise, "than *minion*, or *Politie*, or *Huguenot*, or reiter; equally foul in his debaucheries and his peculations; equally impudent in his vices and his follies; fit son-in-law of *Villequier*; well-chosen master of the wardrobe to the King of France! Who was there besides, Monsieur de Sainctyon? Some expedient infamy was, of course, to be committed, otherwise *d'O*—— would not have been there."

"There were a number of captains and colonels of the different quarters," replied Sainctyon, well pleased to see that the duke now felt the importance of his intelligence; "and the *prévôt* and *Le Comte* began to speak what seemed to me at first simple nonsense, in a confused way, saying that it was necessary to keep guard in a very different manner in Paris from that which we were accustomed to use, for that your coming had excited the minds of the people, and that there was hourly danger of a revolt, and that it would be better for all the captains to meet with their companies together in some particular place, in order to see to the matter. But I replied that nothing could be more dangerous than that which was proposed, for that the companies of armed

citizens would be much better as usual, each in its separate quarter, taking care of that quarter, rather than meeting altogether in one large body of armed men, which was likely to cause a tumult immediately. A number of the other colonels cried out the same thing; but then Monsieur d'O—— cut us all short, saying, 'Give me none of your reasons, gentlemen. What the prévôt has stated to you is the will of the king, and he *must* be obeyed. The place of your meeting is the Cemetery of the Innocents, and there you are all expected to be with your companies at nine o'clock this evening.' Now, my lord, I have come to your highness, by the authority of all the other colonels in whom we can trust, for counsel and direction in this business, assuring you that we have heard it is the intention of the court to pick out from among us thus assembled six or seven of your most zealous friends and supporters, and execute them early to-morrow in the Place de Grève."

The duke paused and thought for a moment ere he replied; but he then said, "I thank you most sincerely, Monsieur de Saintcyon, for the intelligence you have brought me. You are mistaken, however, with regard to what are the intentions of the court, as you will see in one moment. The large body of men in arms which you will have with you when all assembled together, trebles the number of any force in Paris, so that the least attempt to do you wrong at that moment would be a signal for the overthrow of the monarchy. On the contrary, Monsieur de Saintcyon, I believe the thus calling you together in one place has solely for its object to remove you from the quarters where your presence would be useful, in opposition to the iniquitous proceedings of your enemies. To arrest somebody—perhaps myself—is doubtless the object of these persons; and, if you would follow my advice, the course you pursue would be this: to meet as you have been ordered by the king, having first communicated all the facts to the persons under your command whom you can trust. Some one will come to bring you farther orders, depend upon it; find out what those orders are, and let them instantly be communicated to me; but, on no account or consideration, suffer yourselves to be kept together in one place. On the contrary, as soon as you have discovered as far as possible what the designs of your enemies are, lead your companies

to their different quarters, or wherever you may think best to station them. If you want any farther assistance, send hither, and I will despatch experienced officers to take counsel with you as to what is to be done. I hope your opinion coincides with mine, Monsieur de Saintcyon."

"Your words always carry conviction with them, my lord," replied the sheriff, "and I will instantly proceed to obey you."

Thus saying, he took his leave and quitted the duke, hastening, with the rest of the officers of the city, to arm himself cap-a-pie, and present himself with the burgher guard in the Cemetery of the Innocents at the appointed hour.

When that hour arrived, everything through the rest of the city was dark and silent, and but little light shone from the dim lanterns round the cemetery upon the dark masses of armed men that now surrounded it. The officers commanding them looked in each other's faces, as if expecting that some one among them had orders in regard to what they were farther to do; but for several minutes no one announced himself as empowered to direct them, and they had even proposed to separate, when the sheriff Le Comte arrived on horseback at great haste from the side of the Louvre. Having called the colonels of the quarters together, he said, "The king, having been informed that this night an enterprise is to be undertaken against his authority by his enemies, trusts entirely to his citizens of Paris for the defence of the capital, and consequently commands you, in order to have a strong point of resistance, to occupy this cemetery, of which I have here the keys, till to-morrow morning. All the gates will be shut except one wicket, and in a very short time the Marquis de Beauvais Nangis, an experienced officer, will be sent down by the king to command you."*

A murmur ran through the officers and through the men, who, as Le Comte spoke loud, heard every word that passed; but an old captain of one of the quarters burst forth a moment after, exclaiming, "What, shut myself up there as if in prison? They must think me

* This most absurd and impudent proposal would scarcely be credited, were it not to be found in the *Histoire très véritable, &c.*, written by Saintcyon himself, and published by Michel Jouin in the very year 1590.

mad! Not I, indeed, for any of them! I have nothing to do with you, Monsieur le Comte, nor with any of you, except with the inhabitants of my own quarter; and there I shall go directly. Those may go and shut themselves up with you that like. Come, my men; march! Who gave Beauvais Nangis a right to command me, I should like to know! Not the citizens of Paris, I'm sure: so those may obey him that like him." And, putting himself at the head of his men, he marched out, followed by almost all the other companies except one or two, who suffered themselves to be persuaded to enter into the cemetery, where they were locked up by Le Comte, to await whatever fate might befall them.

In the mean time, the other officers of the burgher guard held a consultation together, and determined, instead of proceeding immediately to their different quarters, to occupy the principal points of the city, where they fancied that attempts might be made upon the life or liberty of the chiefs of the League. The avenues to the Hôtel de Guise were strongly guarded, the Rue St. Denis was patrolled by a large party, two companies occupied the Rue St. Honoré, and the utility of these precautions was strongly demonstrated ere they had been long taken.

Before midnight the sound of horses was heard by the two companies in the Rue St. Honoré, and in a moment after appeared the Marquis d'O——, with as many horse arquebusiers as could be spared from the palace. The citizens stood to their arms and barred the way; and d'O——, never very famous for his courage, demanded, in evident trepidation and surprise, what they did there, when they had been ordered to be in the Cemetery of the Innocents.

"We came here to do our duty to our fellow-citizens," replied the same old captain who had spoken before, "and to guard our houses and our property, for which purpose we are enrolled."

"Well, well, you are right," replied the marquis, evidently confounded and undecided; and, turning his horse's rein, he rode back by the same way he came, showing evidently that he had been bound upon some attempt which had been frustrated.

About the same time, the party in the Rue St. Denis had been drawn towards the farther end by the noise of horses and the light of torches; and, on advancing, they

found a number of men on horseback, and a vacant carriage, with two lights before it, just halting at the Convent of the Black Penitents. The good citizens, however, were in an active and interfering mood, and they determined to inquire into an occurrence which otherwise would have passed over without the slightest notice. The horsemen, however, did not wait for many questions; but, evidently as much surprised and embarrassed as the Marquis d'O——, turned their horses' heads and made the best of their way out of the street.

CHAPTER IX.

THE convent of the Black Penitents was a very different building indeed, and a very different establishment altogether from that which the imagination of the reader may have raised up from the images furnished by dark and mysterious tales of Italian superstition. It was certainly intended to be, and was, in some degree, a place of voluntary penitence for women who conceived that they had led a peculiarly sinful life: but there were two classes of nuns confined there by their own good will, one of which consisted of persons who had mingled long with the world, and really led an irregular life therein; while the other comprised a number of young women of high rank, who had never known anything, either of the pleasures or the vices which the others now fled from, but who, either by a natural feeling of devotion or the urgency of relations, had devoted themselves at an early period to the cloister.

In point of diet, fasts, prayers, and penances, the order was certainly very strict; but the building in itself was anything but a gloomy one, and a considerable portion of it, attached to the dwelling of the superior, was set apart for the occasional boarders, who took up their abode there, or for such ladies of high rank and station as might wish to absent themselves for a time from the cares and vanities of the world, and retire to a more intimate communion with God and their own heart, than they could enjoy in such a capital as that of France.

Such was the original intention of these apartments, and the destination of the institution altogether; but we well know how everything intrusted to human management here is corrupted in process of time. The rooms which at first had been furnished simply, were soon decked with every sort of ornament; the visiter's table, as it was called, was separated from the ordinary board of the refectory; cooks and wine-growers did their best to gratify the palate; and, with the exception of the avowed nuns, those who sought shelter in the convent of the Black Penitents were condemned to but little abstinence, and knew only this difference from the world in general, that they had an opportunity of escaping obtrusive society when they thought fit.

It was in one, then, of the handsomest apartments of the building—to speak truth, one far handsomer than that occupied by the queen-mother herself—that Marie de Clairvaut made her abode during the time she was confined in that building. No great restraint, indeed, was put upon her; but the word confinement was justified by the measures taken to prevent her quitting the convent, or holding communication with any one but the nuns themselves.

To this apartment the prioress led her back again, after putting an end to her interview with Charles of Montsoreau; and though the good lady herself was by no means entirely weaned from the affections of this world, she thought it but befitting to read Mademoiselle de Clairvaut a brief lecture on the necessity of attaching herself to higher objects, and an exhortation to abandon earthly attachments, and dedicate herself to the service of Heaven. She hinted, indeed, that there could not be an order more worthy of entering into than the one of which she was an unworthy member; nor, indeed, one in which so many of the little pleasures of life could be combined with deep devotion.

Marie de Clairvaut was, at that moment, far more inclined to weep than smile; but it was scarcely possible not to feel amused at the exhortation of the prioress; and certainly the greater degree of knowledge which the young lady had lately acquired of conventual life would have banished from her mind all desire to take those irrevocable vows which she had once looked forward to with pleasure, even if love had not long before driven all such purposes from her mind.

Glad to be freed from importunity and left to her own thoughts, she replied nothing to the good mother's words; and, as soon as she was gone, gave up her whole mind to the recollection of the interview which she had just had with him she loved. To her, too, that interview was a source of deep gratification; every memory of it was dear to her; every word that Charles of Montsoreau had spoken came back to her heart like the voice of hope; and, giving way to the suggestions of that bright enchantress, she flattered herself with the expectation of seeing him again and again, even if the presence of the Duke of Guise in Paris failed to restore them both to liberty.

Previously to that period, she had been accustomed to see the queen almost every day, and, indeed, more than once during the day; but during the whole of that evening she saw her not again; and though she eagerly asked the next morning to be admitted to the presence of Catharine de Medicis, the only answer that she obtained was, that though the princess was expected again in the evening, she had not yet returned from the palace.

The second day passed as the first had done; but during the evening of the third the excitement of the city had communicated itself even to the inmates of the convent. The portress, the lay sisters, the visitors, obtained the news of the hour from those without, and communicated it to the nuns within. Nor did two of those nuns, who had entered into some degree of intimacy with the fair prisoner, fail to bring her, every half hour, intelligence of what was passing without.

The first news brought was that the guards in the streets of Paris had been all changed and doubled during the preceding night, and that the Holy League and the Court were in continual agitation, watching each other's movements. One of the nuns whispered that people said it had been proposed by the Duke of Epernon to murder the Duke of Guise at the very door of that convent, as he came to visit the queen-mother; and others declared, she added, that the duke had vowed he would not rest till he had taken the crown off Henry's head, and put it on that of the Cardinal de Bourbon.

Then came intelligence that a large body of the Swiss Guards had just entered Paris, and were seen marching rapidly down the Rue St. Honoré, with their files silent

and their drums still. Hourly after that came the news of fresh troops entering the city, and fresh rumours of manifold designs against the life of the Duke of Guise. His house was to be attacked by the French and Swiss Guards, and his head to be struck off in the Place de Grève; he was to be shot by an assassin, placed at one of the windows of an opposite house, the first time he came out; and some said that Villequier had found means to bribe Lanecque, his cook, to poison him that night at supper, as well as all who were with him.

The various scenes, and the dangers and difficulties which she had lately encountered, had given Marie de Clairvaut a far greater knowledge of the world, and of how the important events of the world take place, than was possessed by any of her companions; and she assuredly did not believe a thousandth part of all the different rumours that reached her. The reiteration of those rumours, however, gave her some apprehensions for her great relation; and when, towards the evening, she was visited by the prioress, and found that, beyond all doubt, every gate of the city, except the porte St. Honoré, was closed, her fears became much greater, seeing plainly that it was the design of the court to hem the duke in within the walls of Paris, deprived, as they believed him to be, of all assistance from his friends without.

The night passed over, however, in tranquillity; and when, at an early hour, the young lady rose, she was informed, as she had expected, that a great part of the rumours of the preceding day were false or exaggerated. No Swiss, it was now said, had arrived, except a very small body; the Duke of Guise had been seen on horseback with the king; and the mind of Marie de Clairvaut became reassured in regard to her uncle. The prioress herself—though somewhat given to fear, and, like many other persons, absolutely enjoying a little apprehension in default of other excitement—acknowledged that all seemed likely to go well.

But this state of security was soon changed. The report regarding the arrival of the Swiss had only forerun the event by a few hours, for the sound of drums and trumpets heard from the side of the Cemetery of the Innocents towards seven o'clock in the morning, announced to the Parisians that a large body of troops had been introduced in the night, without the city in general knowing it; and, in a few minutes after, the movements of

these forces evidently showed that some grand stroke was to be struck by the court against its enemies. The Place de Grève was next occupied by a considerable force of mixed Swiss and French guards, favoured in their entrance by the Prévôt des Marchands, and led by the notorious Marquis d'O. Various other points, such as bridges and market-places, were seized upon by the troops; and the greatest activity seemed to reign in the royal party, while that of the Duke of Guise and the League remained perfectly still and inactive, as if thunderstruck at this sudden display of energy.

News of all these proceedings reached Marie de Clairvaut in the convent, accompanied with such circumstances of confirmation that she could not doubt that the intelligence was partly true. But for a short time after the troops were posted, everything seemed to relapse into tranquillity, except that from time to time reports were brought to the convent parlour of citizens, and especially women, being treated with great insolence and grossness by the soldiery. Crillon himself was heard to swear that any citizen who came abroad with a sword should be hung to his doorpost, while worse was threatened to the wives and daughters of the burghers if the slightest resistance was made to the troops. The portress brought news that all the houses and shops in the Rue St. Denis and the Rue St. Honoré were closed; and the prioress herself thought it was high time to cause the convent gates to be shut and barred, and even that door which led into what was called the rector's court, and which usually stood open, to be closed and fastened with large chains.

At length tidings were brought that the first open resistance of the people had commenced; that blood had been shed; and it was rumoured that Crillon himself, attempting to take possession of the Place Maubert with two companies of Swiss and one of French Guards, had been opposed by the scholars of the University and the citizen guard, and forced to retreat without effecting his object.

The terror of the prioress was now extreme; the sound of horses galloping here and there with the most vehement speed, could be heard even in the parlour of the convent, and towards nine o'clock the roll of distant musketry, borne by the wind, completed the terror of the poor nuns.

It was evident now to Marie de Clairvaut that a struggle had commenced between the monarch and the people of the capital, on which depended the safety, perhaps the life, of the Duke of Guise, and, in a great degree, her own fate and happiness. In that struggle she could take no part; and, situated as she was, she could gain no relief even from hearing any exact account of how it proceeded from time to time.

The fears of the good superior of the convent had driven her by this time to the resource of prayer. All the nuns were ordered to assemble in the chapel; and Marie de Clairvaut, feeling that none at that moment had greater need of heavenly protection than herself, prepared to follow, after listening for a few minutes, alone in her chamber, to the distant roll of musketry which still went on; when suddenly the prioress returned in great haste with a paper in her hand, and apparently in much agitation and alarm.

"There, there," she said, thrusting the paper into Marie de Clairvaut's hands, "that is from the queen! Do what you like! Act as you like! I would not go out for the whole world; for just through the grating I have seen a Swiss officer carried by, all dropping with blood as they bore him along the streets. I will go to prayers, I will go to prayers!"

The note from the queen-mother was very brief.

"You know, mademoiselle," it said, "that you have not been kept where you are by my orders. I would fain have set you free two nights ago by any means in my power, if meddling fools on the one side, and cowardly fools on the other, had not frustrated my plan. I have now taken the responsibility upon myself of ordering the gates to be opened to you. The man who brings you this is brave and to be trusted; and what I have to entreat of you is, if I have shown you any kindness, to go with all speed to the hotel of my good cousin of Guise, and beseech him to do his best to allay the tumult, so far, at least, that I myself may come to him with safety. The scenes that you will meet with may be terrible, but you have that blood in your veins which does not so easily shrink from the aspect of danger."

Marie de Clairvaut might be more timid than Catharine de Medicis believed; but, when she thought of freedom, and of being delivered from the power of those whom she detested, to dwell once more with those she

loved, she felt that scarcely any scene would be so terrible as to deter her from seeking such a result. She remarked, however, that the queen did not once mention the name of Charles of Montsoreau, or allude to his fate. "What," she asked herself, "is he still to be kept a prisoner, while I am set at liberty? If so, liberty is scarcely worth having."

She paused, and thought for a moment, and then the hope crossed her mind of setting him at liberty herself.

"Surely," she said, "I could trace my way back to his apartments. I remember every turning well; and then, by bringing him through here, in the confusion and terror that now reign in the convent, I could easily give him his liberty too."

The more she thought of it, the more feasible the scheme seemed to be; and, catching up an ordinary veil to throw over her head, she ran down into the apartments of the queen, which she found as she expected, quite vacant. She had no difficulty in discovering the corridor that led towards the rector's court. At the end there was a door which was locked, but the key was in it, and she passed through. Another short passage led her to the room where she had waited for the queen, and where she had listened to Charles of Montsoreau singing; and then, with a beating and an anxious heart, she hurried on rapidly to the chamber where she had seen him last.

All the bolts were shot, showing her that he was still there; but exactly opposite was an open door, at the top of a small staircase, which seemed to lead to a waiting-room below, for she could distinctly hear the tones and words of two men of the lower class talking over the events that were taking place without.

Gently closing the door at the top of the stairs, Marie de Clairvaut locked and bolted it as quietly and noiselessly as possible. Her heart beat so violently, however, with agitation, that she could scarcely hear anything but its pulsation, though she listened breathlessly to ascertain if the slight noise of the lock had not attracted attention. All was still, however, and she gently undid the fastenings of the opposite door.

Charles of Montsoreau was seated at the table, and lifted his eyes as she entered with a sad and despairing look, expecting to see no one but the attendant. Marie was in his arms in a moment, however; and, holding

up her finger to enjoin silence, she whispered, "Not a word, Charles; but come with me, and we shall be safe! Every one is in the chapel at prayers; orders are given for my liberation; and in five minutes we may be at the Hôtel de Guise."

"What are all those sounds," demanded her lover, in the same tone; "those sounds which I have heard in the streets! I thought I heard the discharge of firearms."

"I fear," she answered, "that it is my uncle's party at blows with that of the king. I know but little myself, however; only that we may make our escape if we will. I will lead you, Charles; I will lead you this time."

"Alas!" said Charles of Montsoreau, as he followed her rapidly, "they have taken my sword from me;" but Marie ran on with a step of light, taking care, however, to lock the doors behind them as she passed to prevent pursuit.

As she had never been in the courtyard since the day of her first arrival, she met with some difficulty in finding her way thither from the queen's apartments: haste and agitation indeed impeding her more than any real difficulty in the way. At length, however, it was reached, and was found vacant of every one but the old portress, who stood gazing through a small iron grating at what was passing without.

"Open the door, my good sister," said Marie de Clairvaut, touching her arm. "Of course the prioress has given orders for you to let me pass."

"Yes, to let you pass, my sister," replied the portress, "for I suppose you are the young lady she meant; but not to let anybody else pass." And she ran her eye over the figure of Charles of Montsoreau.

"Why, surely," replied Marie de Clairvaut, "you would not stop the gentleman who is going to protect me through the streets."

"Why, I do not know," replied the portress, still sturdily setting her face against their passage; "there was another person waiting on the outside to show you the way till just a minute ago. Where he's gone I don't know, but he seemed the fitter person of the two, for he was an ecclesiastic. I have heard, too, of some one being confined up above by Monsieur Villequier's orders; and as the rector's court belongs to him, they

say I must take care what I am about; so I'll just ring the bell and inquire."

"I will save you the trouble of doing that, my good lady," replied Charles of Montsoreau; and, stepping quietly forward, he put her gently but powerfully back with his left hand, while with his right he turned the key in the great lock of the wicket, and threw it open. The portress made a movement of her hand to the bell; but then, thinking better of it, did not ring; and Marie and her lover, without farther opposition, passed at once into the streets of Paris.

There were very few people in the Rue St. Denis; but, on looking up and down on either side, there were seen a party of horsemen, apparently halted at the farther end of the street, on the side nearest to the country, and a number of persons farther down, passing and repassing along one of the cross streets. Some way farther up, between the fugitives and the party of horsemen we have mentioned, were two figures, one of which was evidently dressed in the robes of an ecclesiastic, and both gazing down towards the convent, as if watching for the appearance of some one.

The moment the young count and Marie de Clairvaut appeared, the two figures walked on rapidly in a different direction, and were lost immediately to their sight by turning down another street. There was nothing apparent that could alarm the fugitives in any degree; and though distant shouts and cries were borne upon the air, yet the sound of musketry had ceased, which gave greater courage to Marie de Clairvaut. She needed, indeed, some mitigation of her apprehensions, for the success which she met with in rescuing her lover had been far from increasing her courage in the same proportion that it had been diminished by the very agitation she had gone through. Drawing the thick veil over her face, and as far as possible over her person, she clung to Charles's arm, and hurried on with him, directing him as far as her recollection of the city of Paris would serve. It was long, however, since she had seen it; and although the general direction which she took was certainly right, yet many a turning did she unnecessarily take by the way.

Still, however, they hurried on, till, turning suddenly into one of the small streets which led round into the Rue St. Honoré itself, the scene of fierce contention

which was going on in the capital was displayed to their eyes in a moment.

Across the street, within fifty yards of the turning, was drawn an immense chain from post to post, and behind it was rolled an immense number of barrels filled with sand and stones, and rendered fixed and immovable, against the efforts of any party in front at least, by carts taken off the wheels, barrows, and paving-stones. Behind this barrier again appeared an immense multitude of men, armed with various sorts of weapons snatched up in haste. The front row, indeed, was well furnished with arquebuses, while pistols, swords, daggers, and pikes gleamed in abundance behind. Several of the persons in front were completely armed in the defensive armour of the time; and in a small aperture which had been left at the corner between the barricade and the houses, sufficient only for two people to pass abreast when the chain was lowered, an officer was seen in command, with a page behind carrying his plumed casque.

The lower windows of all the houses throughout Paris were closed, and the manifold signs, awnings, and spouts, as well as the pent-houses which were sometimes placed to keep off the rain and wind from some of the principal mansions, had all been suddenly removed, in order that any bodies of soldiery moving through the streets might be exposed, without a place of shelter, to the aim of the persons above, who might be seen at every window glaring down at the scene below. There, too, were beheld muskets, arquebuses, and every other sort of implement of destruction; and, where these had not been found, immense piles of paving-stones had been carried up to cast down upon the objects of popular enmity.

Between the two fugitives and the barricade were drawn up two companies of Swiss and of one French infantry; and, though standing in orderly array, and displaying strongly the effects of good military discipline, yet there was a certain degree of paleness over the countenances of the men, and a look of hesitation and uncertainty about their officers, which showed that they felt not a little the dangerous position in which they were placed. No shots were fired on either side, however; and the only movement was among the people, who were seen talking together, with their leaders stirring among them, while from time to time those

who were below shouted up to those in the windows above.

Without the slightest apparent fear of the soldiers, who were thus held at bay, two or three people from time to time separated themselves from the populace, and, coming out under or over the chain, passed completely round the guards to the opposite corner of the street, and appeared to be laying a plan for forming another barricade in that quarter, so as completely to enclose the soldiery.

At the sight of all these objects Marie de Clairvaux naturally clung closer to the arm of her lover, and both paused for a moment in order to judge what was best to do. An instant's consideration, however, sufficed; and Charles of Montsoreau led her on to that part of the barricade where the chain was the only obstacle to their farther progress, passing as he did so along the whole face of the French and Swiss soldiers, not one of whom moved or uttered a word to stop them as they proceeded. At the chain, however, they met with a more serious obstacle. The officer whom they had seen in command at that point had now turned away, and was speaking to some people behind; and a rough-looking citizen, armed with a steel cap and breastplate, dropped the point of his spear to the young count's breast, saying, "Give the word, or you do not pass!"

"I do not know the word," replied Charles of Montsoreau. "But I pray you let me pass, for I am one of the friends and officers of the Duke of Guise."

"If you were you would know the word," replied the man. "Keep back, or I will run the pike into you."

"I could not know the word," answered the young count, "if I had been long absent from the duke, as I have been, and were hastening to join him, as I now am."

"Keep back, I say," cried the man, who was no way fond of argument. "You will repent if you do not keep back."

Charles of Montsoreau was about to call to the officer he saw before him, but at that moment the other walked on amid the people, and was seen no more.

"Let us try another street," cried Marie de Clairvaux; "let us try another street, Charles." And, following his suggestion, they hurried back, and took another street farther to the left.

They now found themselves in a new scene; no sol-

diets were there, but dense masses of people were beheld in every direction, and barricades formed or forming at every quarter. Where they were not complete, the lady and her lover passed without difficulty, and almost without notice. One of the young citizens, indeed, as he helped her over a large pile of stones, remarked that her small feet ran no risk of knocking down the barricade; and an old man, who was rolling up a tun to fill a vacant space, paused to let her pass, and, gazing with a sort of fatherly look upon her and her lover, exclaimed, "Get ye gone home, pretty one; get ye gone home. Take her home quick, young gentleman; this is no place for such as she is."

These were all the words that were addressed to them till they again reached another barrier; but there again the word was demanded with as much dogged sullenness as ever; and the young count, now resolved to force his way by some means, determined rather to be taken prisoner by the people, and to demand to be carried to the Hotel de Guise, than be driven from barrier to barrier any longer. He remembered, however, the degree of civility which had been shown to him by Chapelle Marteau some time before, and he demanded of the man who opposed him at the chain if either that personage or Bussi le Clerc were there. The man replied in the negative, but seemed somewhat shaken in his purpose of excluding him by his demand for persons so well known and so popular.

At that moment, however, Charles of Montsoreau caught the sight of a high plume passing among the people at some distance, and the momentary glance of a face that he recollected.

"There is Monsieur de Bois-dauphin," he cried; "in the name of Heaven, call him up here, that he may put an end to all this tedious opposition." The man did not seem to know of whom it was he spoke; but, pointing forward with his hand, the young count exclaimed, "That gentleman with the plume! that gentleman with the tall red plume!"

The word was passed on in a moment, and the officer approached the barrier, when Charles of Montsoreau instantly addressed him by the name of Bois-dauphin, begging him to give them admittance within the barricade, and then adding, in a low voice, that he had with him the duke's ward, Mademoiselle de Clairvaut, who

had just made her escape from the enemies of the house of Guise, and was so terrified that she could scarcely support herself any longer.

"You mistake, sir," replied the officer; "I am not Bois-dauphin, but Chamois: but I remember your face well at Soissons; the Count of Logères, if I am right."

The count gave a sign of affirmation, while Marie de Clairvaux looked up in his face with an expression of joy and relief, and the officer immediately added, "Down with the chain directly, my good friends. You are keeping out the duke's best friends and relations."

The men round the chain hastened eagerly to obey; but some difficulty was experienced in removing the chain, as the barrels—or barriques, as they are called in France, and from which the barriers, called barricades, took their name—pressed heavily upon it, and prevented it from being unhooked.

Charles of Montsoreau was just about to pass under with his fair charge as the most expeditious way, when there came a loud cry from the end of the same street by which they had themselves come thither, of "The queen! the queen! Long live the good Queen Catharine!" And rolling forward with a number of unarmed attendants came one of the huge gilded coaches of the time, passing, at great risk to itself and all that it contained, through or over the yet incomplete barriers farther up the street.

At the barricade where Charles of Montsoreau now was, however, the six horses by which the vehicle was drawn were brought to a sudden stop; and, notwithstanding her popularity, which at this time was not small, the citizens positively refused to remove the barricade, although the queen entreated them in the tone of a suppliant, and assured them that she was going direct to the Hôtel de Guise. Some returned nothing but a sullen answer; some assured her it was impossible, and would take hours to accomplish; and Monsieur de Chamois, who apparently did not choose to be seen actually aiding or directing the people in the formation of the barricades, retreated among the multitude, and left them to act for themselves."

At that moment the eye of Catharine de Medicis fell upon Charles of Montsoreau, and she beckoned him eagerly towards her.

"You are here, of course," she said, "upon the part of the duke."

"Not so, indeed, madam," he replied; "I have but this moment made my escape from that place where I have been so long and so unjustly detained."

"Your escape!" she exclaimed, in a tone that could not be affected. "Villequier has betrayed me. He promised you should be set at liberty yesterday morning. And you, too, Marie," she said, looking at the young count's fair companion: "You surely received the order for your liberation that I sent."

"Safely, madam," replied Marie de Clairvaut, "and thank your majesty deeply. But they have refused to let us pass at several barriers, otherwise I should certainly have executed your majesty's commands."

"This is most unfortunate," said the queen. "But pray, Monsieur de Logères, exert your influence with these people as far as possible. The welfare, perhaps the very salvation, of the state depends upon my speaking with the Duke of Guise directly."

"I will do my best, madam," replied the young count; "but I fear I shall not be able to do much. I will leave her under your protection, madam, and see."

The queen made him place Marie de Clairvaut in the carriage beside her; and, having done this, he turned to the barrier, and spoke to those who surrounded that point where the chain had been lowered to let him pass with far more effect than he had anticipated. To remove the barricade, the people said, was utterly impossible; but if her majesty would descend and betake herself to her chair, which was seen carried by her domestics behind her, they would do what they could to make the aperture large enough for her to pass.

With this suggestion Catharine de Medicis, who had no personal fears, complied at once, and seated herself in the rich gilt-covered chair which followed her. She was about to draw the curtains round her and bid the bearers proceed, but her eye fell upon Marie de Clairvaut; and, after a moment's hesitation between compassion and queenly state, she said, "Poor child, thou art evidently like to drop: come in here with me; there is room enough for thee also, and the queen is old enough not to mind her garments being ruffled. Quick, quick," she added, seeing Marie hesitate; and, without farther words, the fair girl took her place by the queen.

Although the chairs of those times were very different in point of size from those which we see (and now,

alas! rarely see) in our own, yet Mademoiselle de Clairvaut felt that she pressed somewhat unceremoniously on her royal companion; but Catharine de Medicis, now that the act was done, smiled kindly upon her, and told her not to mind; and the bearers, taking up the chair, carried it on, while the populace rolled away one of the tuns to permit its passing through the barricade. The queen's train of attendants pressed closely round the chair, and Charles of Montsoreau followed among them as near as he could to the vehicle, the people shouting as they went, "Long live the queen! Long live the good Queen Catharine!"

At all the barriers a way was made for her to pass, but still the multitudes in the streets were so thick, and the obstacles so many, that nearly three quarters of an hour passed, and the Hôtel de Guise was still at some distance.

At length Catharine de Medicis drew back the curtains of gilt leather, and beckoned the young count to approach, saying, as soon as he was near, "Pray, Monsieur de Logères, go on as fast as possible, and let the duke know that I am coming. I fear that, with all these delays, he may have gone forth ere I reach his hotel. And hark, Monsieur de Logères," she continued, "if out of pure good will I once afforded you one hour of happiness that you did not expect, remember it now; and, should chance serve, speak a word to the duke in favour of my purposes. You understand? Quick; go on!"

Charles of Montsoreau hastened on at the queen's bidding, and having now heard the password often repeated among the citizens, met with no opposition in making his way to the Hôtel de Guise. The only difficulty that he encountered was in the neighbourhood of the mansion itself; for the street was so thickly crowded with people and with horses, that it was scarcely possible to approach the gates. Everything was hurry and confusion too, and the dense mass of people collected in that spot was not like an ordinary crowd, either fixed to one place around the object of their attention, or moving in one direction in pursuit of a general object; but, on the contrary, it was struggling and agitated, by numbers of persons forcing their way through in every different direction, so that it was with the greatest possible labour and loss of time that any one

advanced at all. The great bulk of those present were armed; and amid corselets, and swords, and brassards, heavy boots and long spurs, Charles of Montsoreau, totally unarmed as he was, found the greatest possible difficulty in forcing his way, although, probably, in point of mere personal strength he was more than equal to any one there present.

Long ere he could reach the gate of the hotel there was a loud cry of "The queen! the queen! long live Queen Catharine!" And the crowd, rolling back as if by common consent, swept him away far from the spot which he had gained, and nearly crushed him by the pressure. At some distance he caught a sight of the queen's chair, but it stopped at the edge of the crowd, and the movements that he saw in that part of the mass made him believe that Catharine was descending from the vehicle, intending to proceed on foot.

He doubted not that the queen's attendants, who were very numerous, would keep off the multitude; and even the rolling back of the people upon himself evinced that they were inclined to show her every respect. But still, feeling that all he loved on earth was there, he naturally strove to see over the heads of the people. It was in vain that he did so, however, for between him and the line along which the queen was passing was a sea of waving plumes of every height and colour, and all that he could discover was how far she had proceeded on her way to the gates, by the rush of the people closing up behind her as soon as she had passed.

Just as she was entering the mansion a considerable degree of confusion was created in the crowd by one of the horses, held not far from the place where Charles of Montsoreau stood, either frightened by the noise, or pressed upon by the people, beginning to kick violently. The man whom he first struck was luckily well covered with defensive armour; but he was knocked down notwithstanding, and all the rest rushed back, pressing upon the others behind them in confusion and dismay.

Charles of Montsoreau, however, took advantage of the opportunity to make his way forward; but, just as he was so doing, he was encountered by the Marquis de Brissac hurrying eagerly forward through the crowd. He was dressed in his ordinary clothes, and armed with nothing but his sword; but there was fire and eagerness in his eyes, and he seized the young count by the

hand, exclaiming, "I am delighted to have found you, Logères. I wanted a man of action and of a good head. Come with me! come with me, quick! or we shall have more mischief done than is at all needful. They have begun firing again! There! Don't you hear!"

"I hear now," replied the count, "but I did not pay attention to it before. I would come with you willingly, Monsieur de Brissac, but I wish to see the duke. He does not know yet that I am at liberty: neither have I a sword."

"The duke cannot see you now," cried Brissac, still holding the count by the arm. "The queen and her people are with him. I will get you a sword. Come with me, come with me. Here, fellow, give the count your sword." And, taking hold of the baldric of one of the men near, he made him unbuckle it, and threw it over the count's shoulders.

For Brissac, who was well known to almost everybody there, the people now made way at least in some degree; and, followed by the young count, he hurried on, till they both could breathe somewhat more at liberty.

In the mean time, the sound of the musketry was heard increasing every moment; and Brissac, after listening for a moment, exclaimed, "It comes from the *Marché Neuf*. By Heavens! Logères, we must put a stop to this, or they will take up the same music all over the town, and we shall have those poor devils of Swiss slaughtered to a man. Who is that firing at the *Marché Neuf*?" he demanded, at the first barrier they reached.

"Our people," replied the captain of the quarter, "are firing upon the soldiers in the market-place, I hear."

"Quick, Arnault, quick!" cried Brissac. "Get the keys of the slaughter-house, and bring them after me with all speed! Come on, Logères, come on!" he continued, unable to refrain from a joke even in the exciting and terrible scene that was going on. "The king will find, I am afraid, that he has brought these pigs to a bad market, as the good ladies of the *halle* say. We must save as many of them from being butchered as we can, however." And, running on, followed by two or three persons from the different barriers that they passed, they soon reached the corner of the *Marché Neuf*, where an extraordinary and terrible scene was exposed to their eyes.

The market, which was somewhat raised above a low street that passed by its side, was a large open space, having at that time neither booths nor pent-houses to cover the viands, usually there exposed, from the sun: each vender that thought fit spreading out his own little canvass tent over his goods when he brought them. On the side by which Brissac and Charles of Montsoreau approached there was a low wall, not a yard high, separating the market from the street which passed by the side, with some steps up to the former, as well as two or three open spaces to give ingress; and on the other side was a long low range of covered slaughter-houses, with tall buildings overtopping them beyond.

In the midst of this open space, cooped in by barricades on every side, and surrounded by tall houses with innumerable windows, was a body of about eight hundred Swiss. They were standing firm in the midst of the place, forming a three-sided front, with their right and left resting on the slaughter-houses; and while their front rank poured a strong and well-directed but ineffectual fire upon the two barricades opposite, the second rank endeavoured to pick off their assailants at the different windows.

In the mean while, however, from those windows and barricades was poured in upon the unhappy Swiss a tremendous fire, almost every shot of which told. The people at the barriers rose, fired, and then bent down again behind their defences, while the men at the windows kept up a still more formidable but more irregular discharge, sometimes firing almost all together, as if by common consent, sometimes picking off, here and there, any of their enemies they might fix upon; so that at one moment the whole sweeping lines of the tall houses were in one blaze of fire and cloud of smoke, and the next, the flashes would drop from window to window, over each face of the square, like some artificial firework.

Such was the scene of confusion and destruction which burst upon the eyes of Brissac and Charles of Montsoreau when they entered the square of the *Marché Neuf*. The fire of the barrier which they passed was instantly stopped, but in other places it was still going on; and Brissac, without the slightest hesitation, jumped at once upon the low wall we have mentioned, and waved his hat in the air, shouting loudly to cease firing.

Some cessation instantly took place, but still not altogether; and Charles of Montsoreau, rapidly crossing the market-place to command the men at the opposite barricade to stop, was slightly wounded in the arm by a ball from one of the windows.

It luckily happened that the baldric which had been procured for him by Brissac bore the colours of the League and the cross of Lorraine embroidered on the front; and the defenders of the barrier stopped instantly at his command. When that was accomplished, he turned to join Brissac, and, as he went, called to the people at the lower windows of the houses to stop firing in the name of the Duke of Guise, and to pass the same order up to those above them. The Swiss had ceased immediately, very glad of any truce to an encounter in which fifty or sixty of their number had already fallen, while many more were seriously wounded.

The keys which Brissac had sent for had by this time arrived; and, accompanied by the young count, he advanced, hat in hand, to the officer in command of the Swiss, who met him half way with a sad but calm and determined countenance.

"You see, sir," said Brissac, "that it is perfectly impossible for you to contend against the force opposed to you."

"Perfectly," replied the officer; "every street is a fortress, every house a redoubt. But we never intended to contend, and, indeed, had received orders to retire, but could not do so on account of the barricades, when suddenly some shot was fired from behind those buildings; and whether it was a signal to commence the massacre, or whether the people thought that we had fired, I know not, but they instantly began to attack us; and here are more than sixty of my poor fellows butchered without cause."

"There is only one plan to be pursued, sir," replied Brissac, "in order to save you. You must instantly lay down your arms."

"Were the people opposed to me soldiers, sir," replied the officer, "I would do so at a word; but the people seem in a state of madness, and the moment we are disarmed they might fall upon us all, and butcher us in cold blood; yourself and all, for aught I know."

"I have provided against that, sir," replied Brissac. "Here are the keys of those buildings, which will shelter

ter you from all attack. I must not put in your hands a fortress against the citizens of Paris; so that, while you retain your weapons, you cannot enter; but, the moment you lay down your arms, I will give you that shelter, and pledge my word for your protection."

The joy which spread over the officer's countenance at this offer plainly showed, what neither word nor look had done before, how deeply he had felt the terrible situation in which he was placed.

"It shall be done this instant," he said; and returning to his men, while Brissac unlocked the gates, he made them pile their arms in the market-place, amid a deafening shout from the people on all sides. The Swiss then marched, rank by rank, into the place of shelter thus afforded them; and Brissac, bowing low to the commander, who entered the last, said with a smile, which the other returned but faintly, "In name, my dear sir, the exchange you are just making is not an agreeable one; but I am sure you will find that this slaughter-house is rather a more comfortable position than the one from which I have just delivered you."

The marquis then caused a guard of the citizens to be placed over the arms of the Swiss; and, turning to Charles of Montsoreau, he said, "Come, let us quick to the new bridge. The king used to say of me, Monsieur de Logères, that I was good for nothing, either on the sea or on the land. I think he will find to-day that I am good for something on the pavement."

Thus saying, he led the way back through the barrier; and Charles of Montsoreau, having more leisure now than before to observe the countenances and demeanour of the different people around, could not help thinking that older and more skilful soldiers than the citizens of Paris could boast were busy in directing the operations of the populace in different parts of the city. The scene was a strange and extraordinary one altogether; the streets were absolutely swarming with people, and crowds were hurrying hither and thither through every open space, but were still kept in dense masses by the constant obstruction of the barricades.

Hastening on through the midst of these masses with Brissac, the young nobleman's eye ran hastily over all the crowds that he passed, when suddenly, at the end of one of the largest streets, which rose between the dark gigantic houses on either side with a gentle ac-

olivity from the spot where he then stood, he saw among the various groups which were moving rapidly along or across it, one which attracted his attention more particularly than the rest. It was at that moment coming down the street, but proceeding in a somewhat slanting direction towards the corner of another small street, not fifty yards from the spot where he then was. There were two figures in it, in regard to which he could not be deceived: the one nearest him was the Abbé de Boisguerin, the second was his own brother, Gaspar de Montsoreau; and he could not help imagining that another whom he saw leading the way was that personage who had first called upon him on his arrival in Paris, named Nicolas Poulain.

Before he could recollect himself, an exclamation of surprise had called the attention of Brissac; but, remembering how much his brother had excited the indignation of the Duke of Guise, and that his very life might be in danger if taken in the streets of Paris at that time, Charles of Montsoreau only answered in reply to Brissac's questions, that he had fancied he saw somebody whom he knew.

"There goes worthy Master Nicolas Poulain," said Brissac, "and the good Curé of St. Geneviève, as zealous in our cause as any one; but we can't stop to speak with them just now." And he was hurrying on, but Charles of Montsoreau stopped him, saying,

"For my part, Monsieur de Brissac, I shall return to the Hôtel de Guise. The duke, I dare say, has concluded his interview with the queen by this time, and I much wish to speak with him."

"Well, you cannot miss your way," cried Brissac. "Take that first turning to the left, and then the third to the right, and it will lead you straight to the Porte Cochère."

Charles of Montsoreau nodded his head, and hurried on, with manifold anxieties and apprehensions in his bosom, which twenty times he pronounced to be absurd, but which, nevertheless, he could not banish by any effort of reason.

CHAPTER X.

WE must now return to mark what was passing at another point in the capital an hour or two earlier than the events narrated in the end of the last chapter. The Duke of Guise sat in a cabinet in his hotel, with his sword laid upon the table before him, which also bore a pen, and ink, and paper, and some open letters. His foot was resting on a footstool, his dress plain but costly, and not one sign of anything like preparation for the stirring events, which were to take place that day, apparent in either his looks, his apparel, or his demeanour.

Beside him, booted, and in some degree armed, stood the Count of St. Paul; while Bois-dauphin, who had just had his audience, was leaving the cabinet by a low door, and the duke, bending his head, appeared listening with the utmost tranquillity to what his friend was telling him.

"Then the matter is done," he said, as soon as St. Paul had concluded. "The Place Maubert is in the hands of the people, and may be made a Place d'Armes. Bois-dauphin tells me that the soldiers under Tinteville, at the Petit Pont, are barricaded on all sides, and cannot move. You give me the same account of the Marché Neuf; the same is the case with the Grève; the French Guard under the Chatelet are hemmed in all round; the Cemetery of the Innocents is invested on all sides; and Malivaut, I understand, has been driven from his post in great disorder. This being done, St. Paul, you see these troops of the king's are not exactly in fortresses, but in prisons; and how Biron, or Crillon, or the king himself, could have committed the extraordinary error—all of them being men of experience—how they could have committed the extraordinary error, I say, of dividing their soldiery in the narrow streets and squares of such a city as Paris, sending them far from the palace, and leaving them without communication with each other, I cannot conceive. However, they are all in our hands, and what we must think of is to make a moderate use of our success. Try to keep the people from

any active aggression, St. Paul; let them stand upon the defensive only; spread among them different parties of those whom we have collected, who may give them direction and assistance if needful. But keep the principal part of our own people in this neighbourhood, that we may direct them on any point where their presence may be necessary."

"Might it not be as well, your highness," said the count, "to take one measure more! We have far more people than enough to guard all the barricades. I can undertake to draw ten or even twelve thousand from different spots, and march them out of the *Porte Neuve*."

"To lead them where?" demanded the Duke of Guise, lifting his eyes to the countenance of St. Paul with a meaning expression.

"To the Tuileries and to the Louvre," replied the count. "Every point of importance," he added, in a low, meaning voice, "will then be invested."

The Duke of Guise waved his hand. "No, St. Paul, no!" he said, "that step would instantly require another. No; if the enemy misjudge our forbearance, and attempt aught towards shedding the blood of the citizens of Paris, we must then act as God shall direct us. In the mean time, I say not, that the barricades may not be carried up to the gates of the Louvre, for that is for our own defence; but at present, St. Paul, at present, it must be on the defensive that we stand. I beseech you, however, to see that no ground is lost in any part of the city, for you know how soon an advantage is gained. Should it be needful, send for me, but not till the last extremity."

The Count of St. Paul turned to obey, but paused for a moment before he had reached the door. The Duke of Guise by this time was gazing fixedly upon the hilt of his sword, as it lay upon the table before him, and seemed perfectly unconscious that the count had not quitted the room. A slight smile curled that gentleman's lip as he saw the direction that the duke's eyes had taken, and he opened the door and passed out.

For several minutes the Duke of Guise continued to gaze in deep thought; and his bosom at that moment was certainly full of those sensations which never, perhaps, occur to any man but once in his lifetime, even if Fate have cast him one of those rare and memorable lots, which bear down the winner thereof, upon the

stream of fame and memory, through a thousand ages after his own day is done. The fate of his country was in his hands; he had but to stretch out his arm and grasp the crown of France: and what temptations were there to do so to a mind like his!

It must not be forgotten that the Duke of Guise, by every hereditary feeling, by every prejudice of education, as well as by many strong and peculiar points in his own character, was in truth and reality a strenuous and zealous supporter of the Roman Catholic Church. His veneration for that great and extraordinary institution had descended to him from his father, and had formed the great principle of action in his own life. Even had he merely assumed that devotion for the church during so many years, the very habit must have moulded his feelings into the same form; and he must have been by this time more or less a zealous advocate of the Catholic cause, even if he had set out with caring nothing in reality about it. But such was not the case: his father had educated him in principles of strict and stern devotion to the faith in which they were born; and though in the gayeties and the frivolities of youth, or the eager struggles of manhood, he might have appeared in the ordinary affairs of life anything on earth but the zealot, yet still his zeal would have been far more than a pretence, had it only been the effect of early education and constant habit.

There was something still more, however, to be said. The spirit of the Catholic Church was consonant to, and harmonious with, the whole tone of his own feelings, at once deep, powerful, imaginative, enthusiastic, politic, and commanding. Chivalry, feudalism, and the Church of Rome went hand in hand: all three were, indeed, in their decay; but if ever man belonged to the epoch of chivalry, it was Henry, duke of Guise; and he clung to all the other institutions that were attached to that past epoch, of which he in spirit was a part.

Attached, therefore, sincerely, deeply, and zealously to the Catholic Church—far, far more than his brother the Duke of Mayenne ever was or ever could be—Guise beheld a weak monarch, whom he despised and hated from the very bottom of his heart, wasting the whole energies of the Catholic party in France in a mere pretence of opposing the Huguenots, and, in fact, caring for nothing but so to balance the two religious factions

as to be permitted to remain in luxurious indolence, swallowed up with the most foul, degrading, and abhorrent vices; setting an example of low and filthy effeminacy to his whole court; and only checkering a life of soft, unmanly voluptuousness by bursts of frantic debauchery, or moments of apparent penitence and devotion, so wild and extravagant as to betray their own affectation by the absurdities which they displayed.

The church to which Guise was attached was thus betrayed; his own especial friends and relations were neglected, insulted, or maltreated; all that were great or good in the nobility of France were shut out from the high offices of state, trampled upon by the minions of the king, and plundered by insolent and fraudulent financiers; everything in the government was venal and corrupt; the exertions of commerce and industry put to a stop; assassination, poison, and the knife of daily occurrence; and bands of audacious plunderers tearing the unhappy land from north to south.

The Duke of Guise might well think, as he sat there gazing upon the hilt of that renowned sword, which had never been drawn in vain, that, were he to say the few short words which were all that was necessary to bring the crown to his head and the sceptre to his hand, he might well think that he could obtain for France thereby those great objects which he conceived were, beyond all others, necessary to her well-being. He might well conceive, too, that the cost of so doing would but be little: civil war already reigned in the land; the whole south of France was one scene of contention; it already existed in the capital; and would, in all probability, be shortened rather than prolonged by his striking the one great and decisive blow.

The king, who was absolutely at his mercy, and whom he could cast down from his throne at a single word, was no obstacle in his way; the Epernons, the d'Aumonts, the Villequiers, he looked upon, notwithstanding all their favour, and the semblance of power which had been cast into their hands, as a mere herd of deer, to be driven backward and forward, like beasts of the chase, between himself and Henry of Navarre. And then, again, when he looked to the great and chivalrous Huguenot monarch, what were the feelings with which he regarded the struggle that might take place between them? His breast heaved, his chest expanded,

his head was raised, his eye flashed with the thought of encountering an adversary worthy of the strife, a rival of powers equal or nearly equal to his own. When he thought of army to army, and lance to lance, against Henry of Navarre, with the crown of France between them as the golden prize of their mighty strife, his spirit seemed on fire within him, and he had wellnigh forgotten all his resolutions, in order to do the daring act which might bring about that glorious result; and then, when fancy pictured him returning triumphant over his rival, with peace restored, and civil war put down, and commerce flourishing, and the rights of France maintained on every frontier, a uniform religion, a happy people, and the strong truncheon of command in a hand that could wield it lightly, the prospect was too bright, too beautiful, too tempting; and he pressed his hand upon his eyes, as if he could so shut it out from his mental vision.

What was it that deterred him? There was much reason on his side; there was little, if any risk; there was the object of the church's safety; there was the gratification of vengeance upon those who had insulted and injured him; there were the exhortations of the King of Spain; there was almost the universal voice of the people in the north of France; there was his own ambition; there was the certainty that all he did would be absolved, sanctioned, confirmed by the head of the Catholic Church; there was already in his favour the solemn and decided declaration of the highest theological authority in France; and there was many a specious argument, which no one could expect that he should sift and refute against himself.

What was it that deterred him? Was it that there is a majesty which hedges in a king, sufficiently strong to overawe even the Duke of Guise himself? Was it that the habitual reverence which he had been accustomed to show towards the kingly office, veiled or shielded from his eyes the real weakness of him who exercised it? Was it that he feared himself? Or was it that he felt the act of usurpation must be confirmed by murder?

It cannot be told! Certain it is that he dreamed grand visions; that he saw mighty prospects of fair paths leading to honour, and glory, and high renown, and his country's good, and his church's safety; and that he banished the visions, and would not take the only step

which would have overpassed every barrier to his forward way.

The words of Catharine de Medicis rung in his ears ; the words which had warned him against the growth of ambition in his own heart ; he heard the shouts of the people without, and her warning voice again came back in tones that seemed wellnigh prophetic. Almost, it would appear, without a cause, the vanity of all things seemed to press upon his mind at that moment with stronger effect than he had ever experienced before. There was a leaden weight upon his spirits, he knew not why. He seemed to feel the hand of Fate, the tangible pressure of a directing arm, selecting for him the path he was to pursue, and forcing him thereon at the very moment when supreme command appeared given to him without a check.

The sun seemed to dazzle his eyes as he gazed from the window ; vague figures passed before him, and crossed the dancing motes, picturing, like shadows, the persons of whom he had been thinking. He saw Henry the Third distinctly before him, and fierce faces, and bloody knives, and figures weltering in their blood upon the ground. He felt that he had indulged fancy too far ; that he had given way to thought at the moment of action ; that his course must be shaped as he had predetermined it in calmer hours ; and, waving his hand, as if to dispel the visions that still haunted his sight, he rose from his chair, leaning heavily on the table, pushed the sword away from him, and murmured to himself, "No, no ! I will never be a usurper ! Ho, without there !" he continued. "Who waits ? What is that sound of musketry !"

"Erian has just arrived, my lord," replied the attendant, "to bear your highness word that the citizens have driven Maulivaut down into the market, and that is the firing we hear."

"Tell Erian to speed back as fast as possible," replied the duke, "and bid them cease directly. Let them content themselves with hemming in the enemy, without attacking them. But I hear more firing still ; I shall be obliged to go forth myself."

"Monsieur de Brissac has just gone out on one side, your highness," replied the attendant, "and Monsieur de St. Paul on the other, both with the purpose of stopping the bloodshed. But they have not had time to get to the spot yet."

"It has ceased now," said the duke, listening. "It has ceased now towards the Chatelet, but on the other side it is fierce. Go down and see what are those shouts, and let me know! Surely Henry," he added, "would not venture into such a scene as this. Alas, no! He would venture nothing, dare nothing, either for his own sake or his country's."

A moment after the attendant returned, saying, "It is the queen, my lord; her majesty Queen Catharine. The crowd of people prevents the chair from coming up to the gates; but she has descended, and is coming on foot."

The duke instantly started up and approached the head of the staircase for the purpose of hurrying down to receive his royal visiter; but Catharine was by this time upon the stairs, with Madame de Montpensier and a number of other ladies, who had passed the morning at the Hotel de Guise, surrounding her on all sides. The duke advanced and gave her his hand to aid her in ascending the stairs; and perhaps the aspect of Catharine at that moment taught him, more fully than anything else, how tremendous was the scene without, and how completely the capital of France was at his disposal.

Habituated for more than twenty years to control all her feelings, and to repress every appearance of fear or agitation, Catharine de Medicis was nevertheless on the present occasion completely overcome. Her lip quivered, her head shook, and there was a degree of wild apprehension in her eyes which it was some moments ere her strongest efforts could conquer.

"Cousin of Guise," she said, as soon as she had drawn her breath, "I must speak with you a few moments alone; I must beseech you to give me audience, even if it be but for half an hour."

"Your majesty has nothing to do but command," replied the duke. "My time is at your disposal."

The queen smiled slightly at feeling how easily the empty words may be retorted upon those that use them. It has been said that it costs nothing to use civil language and say courtly things, even when insincere: but it costs much; for, sooner or later, we are sure to be paid in the same coin to which we have given currency, perhaps even more depreciating than when we sent it forth. She answered only by that smile, how-

ever; and the duke led her forward to his cabinet, all the rest of those who crowded the staircase remaining behind.

With every sign of ceremonious reverence the Duke of Guise led his royal guest to a seat, and stood before her; but she paused for a moment, and hesitated ere she spoke. "My lord," she said at length, "this is a terrible state of things."

"Your majesty knows more of it than I do," replied the duke, calmly, "for I have not gone forth from the house to-day; but I hear there is some tumult in Paris."

"Henry of Guise!" replied the queen, fixing her eyes upon him, "Henry of Guise, be sincere!"

"Madam," replied the duke, "one must adapt one's tone to circumstances. With those who are sincere with us we may be as candid as the day; but when we are sadly taught the fallacy of words and the frugality of promises, we must, of course, shelter ourselves under some reserve."

"Your highness's words imply an accusation," said Catharine, somewhat sharply. "In what have I dealt insincerely with you?"

"Your majesty promised me," replied the Duke of Guise, "that my noble friend, the young Count of Logères, should be set at liberty not later than yesterday morning; and that my ward, Mademoiselle de Clairvaut, should be immediately replaced under my protection."

"You have done me wrong, your highness," replied the queen, "and attributed to want of will what only arose from want of power. Villequier has formally claimed the guardianship of Mademoiselle de Clairvaut; his application is before the Parliament at this hour; and orders have been given on all hands for the young lady to remain under the protection of the king till the question is decided."

"I will cut his cause very short," replied the Duke of Guise, frowning, "if she be not within my gates ere six hours be over."

"She is within your gates even now, my lord," replied the queen. "Your highness is too quick. I sent an order myself for the liberation of the Count de Logères, for that only depended upon the king my son. Some one, however, diverted it from its right course, and he was only set free this morning. He ought to have been here before me, for I sent him on; but I

suppose he has not been able to pass the mass of people round your doors. As to Mademoiselle de Clairvaut, I have risked everything to restore her to you; and notifying to Villequier and Epemon that I would no longer countenance her being detained, I liberated her on my own authority, and brought her here in my own chair. She would have been freed two nights ago, for I wished to effect the matter by a little stratagem, and have her carried from the convent and brought hither without any one knowing how or by whom it was done; but the meddling burgher guard came up and drove the people that I sent away. But let us, oh let us, my lord, discuss more serious things. Have I now been sincere with you?"

"You have, madam," replied the duke, "and I thank your majesty even for doing an act of justice, so rare are they in these days. But may I know what are now your majesty's commands?"

"You cannot affect to doubt, cousin," replied the queen, "that Paris, the capital of my son's kingdom, is in revolt from end to end. Can you deny that you are the cause of it?"

"Though no man is bound to accuse himself, madam," replied the duke, returning the queen's searching glance with a calm, steady gaze, "yet I will answer your question, and sincerely. I have in no degree instigated this rising. His majesty is the cause, and not I. We see, without any reason or motive whatsoever, or any expression of the king's displeasure, large bodies of troops introduced into the city during the night, without drums beating or colours flying, and altogether in a clandestine manner. We see them take possession of various strong points, and we hear them using menacing language; Monsieur de Crillon himself passing through the streets, breathing nothing but menaces and violence; and if your majesty can wonder that in these circumstances the citizens of Paris fly to arms for the defence of their property, of their lives, and of the honour of their women, it is more than I can do. In truth, I know not what the king expected to produce, but the very result which is before us. I assure your majesty, however, that it is not at my instigation that this was done; though, even if I had done this, and far more, I should have held myself completely justified."

"Justified," said the queen, shaking her head mourn-

fully. "What then becomes of all your highness said upon ambition but three days ago?"

"Ambition, madam, would have nothing to do with it," replied the duke. "It would have been merely self-defence. Who had so much cause to fear that the rash and despotic proceedings which have taken place were aimed at him as I have had? Who had so much cause to know that the object of all this military parade was not the hanging of some half dozen miserable burghers in the Place de Grève, but the arrest, and perhaps massacre, of Henry of Guise, and all his kind and zealous friends? Can you deny, madam, that such was the cause for which these soldiers were brought hither? Can you deny, madam, that only yesterday, when the king, assuming friendship towards me, invited me to ride forth with him—can you deny that it was debated in his council whether he should or should not order his guards to murder me as we went? Confident in my own conscience, madam, and believing that the king, though misinformed, entertained no personal ill-will against one who had served him well, I came to Paris, walked through the royal guards, and presented myself at court, in the midst of my enemies, with only eight attendants; and ever since that day there has not been an hour in which my life and liberty have not been in danger, in which schemes for my destruction have not been agitated in the cabinet of the king; and I say that, under these circumstances, I should have been perfectly justified in raising the people for my own defence. But, madam, I did not do so; and I am not the cause of this rising. What is it, Monsieur de Bois-dauphin?" he added, turning to a gentleman who had just entered, and who now answered a few words in a low tone. The duke retired with him into the window, and, after speaking for a moment or two in whispers, Guise dismissed him and returned, making apologies to the queen for the interruption.

It may be said, without noticing it again, that the same sort of occurrence took place more than once; different officers and attendants coming in, from time to time, speaking for a moment with the duke in private, and hurrying out again. Though Catharine de Medicis felt this to be somewhat uncereemonious treatment, and though it evidently showed her that, whatever share the duke had had in raising the tumult at first, he assuredly

now guided all its proceedings, and ruled the excited multitudes from his own cabinet, yet in other respects she was not sorry for time to pause and think ere she replied, knowing that she had to deal with one whose mind was far too acute to be satisfied with vague or unsatisfactory answers.

"My lord," she said, as soon as the conversation was resumed, "I did not mean exactly to say that you are the active cause of these proceedings, or that you have excited the people. What I meant was, that your presence in Paris is the occasion of this emotion. You cannot doubt that it is so; and therefore, being in this respect the cause, it is only yourself who can provide the remedy."

"Pardon me, madam," replied the Duke of Guise; "I do not see how that can be. In the first place, I have all along denied that I am the cause, either inert or active. The people have risen for their own defence, though, certainly, my defence and my welfare is wrapped up in that of the people. In the next place, I know not what remedy can be provided in the present state of affairs. What have you to propose, madam?"

"What I come to propose, my fair cousin," replied the queen, "and what, I am sure, is the only way of quieting the tumult that now exists is, that you should quit Paris immediately. Nay! nay! hear me out. If I propose this thing to you, it is not without being prepared and ready to offer you such inducements and recompenses, both for yourself and all your friends, as may show you how highly the king, my son, esteems you, and at what a price he regards the service you will render him. Look at this paper, good cousin of Guise, signed with his own name, and see what perfect security and contentment it ought to give you."

The Duke of Guise, however, put the paper gently and respectfully from him, replying, "Madam, what you propose is impossible. Either the people of Paris have risen in their own defence, in which case my leaving the city would have no effect upon the tumult, or else they have risen in mine, when it would be base to abandon them. I believe the first of these cases is the true one, and that, therefore, by staying in Paris, I may serve the king far more effectually than I could by quitting the city."

Catharine de Medicis had nothing directly to reply to

the reasoning of the duke; but she answered somewhat warmly, "By my faith, your highness, I think some day you will logically prove that the best way to serve the King is to take the crown off his head."

"Madame," replied the duke, dryly, "Messieurs d'Epemon, Villequier, Joyeuse, D'O., and others, have long been trying to prove the proposition which your majesty puts forth; but they have not yet convinced me of the fact, nor ever will. They, madam, are or have been those who have put the king's crown in danger; and, as far as regards myself, I have but to remind you that, if I had any designs upon the king's person, five hundred men sent out this morning by the Porte de Nesle, and five hundred more by the Porte Neuve, would be quite sufficient for all the purposes your majesty attributes to me."

Catharine de Medicis turned deadly pale, seeing how easily the palace itself might be invested. At that instant one of the duke's officers again entered, and spoke to him for a moment or two apart. The queen quietly took up a pen from the table, wrote a few words on a slip of paper, and, opening the door of the cabinet, demanded, in a low voice, "Is Pinart there?"

A gentleman instantly started forward, and putting the paper in his hands, she spoke to him for a moment in a whisper, ending with the words, "Use all speed!" Then re-entering the cabinet, she took her seat while the duke was yet speaking with his friend.

"Cousin of Guise," she said, as soon as he had done and the stranger had departed, "you have certainly given me strong proof that you have no evil intentions; but such power is, alas! very dangerous to trust one's self with. Read that paper, I beseech you, and tell me if there be any other thing you can demand; any other condition which will induce you to quit Paris, even for a few days?"

"It were useless for me to read it, madam," replied the duke. "Nothing on earth that could be offered me would induce me to quit Paris at this moment. But believe me, madam, my being here has nothing to do with the continuance of the tumult. I have sent out all my friends, and officers, and relations already to calm the disturbance. But it is the king who is the cause of it, or, rather, the king's evil advisers. As he has occasioned it, he must put a stop to it."

"What would you have him to do?" demanded Catharine de Medicis, quickly. "How would you have him act?"

"In the first place," replied the duke, "let him recall his troops; let them be withdrawn from every post they occupy! Their presence was the cause of the people's rising, and, as soon as they are gone, the emotion will gradually subside."

"He has sent the order of recall already," replied Catharine; "but it is impossible to execute it. Hemmed in by barricades on every side, how can they retire, or take one step without danger?"

"That, I trust," replied the duke, "can soon—"

But he was interrupted in the midst of what he was saying by the sudden entrance of Charles of Montsoreau.

"I beg your highness to pardon me," he said. "Your majesty will, I am sure, forgive me, when I ask if you know what has become of Mademoiselle de Clairvaut?"

There was anxiety and apprehension in every line of Charles of Montsoreau's countenance, and the queen's brow instantly gathered together with a look of mingled surprise and apprehension.

"She followed me into the hotel, did she not?" exclaimed the queen. "I got out of the chair first, and she came immediately after. Surely I saw her upon the stairs!"

"The porter, madam, declares that there was no lady entered with your majesty; that two or three gentlemen came in; and that it was some time before your chair and the rest of your male attendants could come up, on account of the crowd. I have ventured to ask Madame de Montpensier and the rest of the ladies in the house before I intruded here; but no one has seen Mademoiselle de Clairvaut, and she is certainly not in the house."

"Is this the way I am treated?" exclaimed the Duke of Guise, his brow gathering into a tremendous frown. "Is this the way that I am sported with at the very moment—"

"Nay! nay! nay! Cousin of Guise," exclaimed Catharine de Medicis, rising from her seat and clasping her hands. "So help me, Heaven, as I have had no share in this! I descended from my chair in the midst of the crowd—knowing terror and agitation, such as, indeed, I never knew before—and I thought that this poor

girl had followed. I was too much engrossed with the thoughts of my son's throne tottering to its foundation to pay much attention to anything else; but Monsieur de Logères himself can tell you that I treated her with all kindness, and that mine was the order for her liberation."

"Indeed it was, my lord," replied Charles of Montsoreau. "Her majesty displayed every sort of kindness, and Mademoiselle de Clairvaut was in the same chair with her when I left her, scarce a hundred yards from these gates. I fear, my lord, however, that there are machinations taking place which I must explain to you." And in a low voice he told the duke what he had seen while returning from the Marché Neuf.

"This Nicolas Poulain is a villain," exclaimed the duke, after he had listened. "I have received the proofs thereof this very morning. Ho! without there! Madam, by your leave," he continued, turning to the queen, "I would fain speak with these attendants of yours, but dare not presume to command them hither in your presence."

The queen immediately directed all those who had followed her chair or had borne it to be called in, and the duke questioned them sharply, in a stern and lofty tone, regarding what they had seen of Mademoiselle de Clairvaut after the queen had passed on.

The answer of each was the same, however, namely, that none of them had seen anything of her. Some had accompanied the queen and kept the way clear, and two others, who had remained with the chair, as well as the bearers themselves, declared that the young lady, after having descended from the queen's chair, had gone on; that there was an immediate rush of the people, which separated them from the rest of the royal train; and that, what between the pressure and confusion that immediately took place, and the kicking of one of the chargers, which made the people run back with cries and affright, they had seen nothing more of the party to which they had belonged, till they had made their way up to the Hôtel de Guise and obtained admission.

The duke paused with a gloomy and anxious brow. "Go, some one," he said at length, "go up to Philibert of Nancy, who was placed above, to watch what was taking place from the top of the house. Ask him what

he saw after the queen's arrival, and bring me down word."

"May I go, my lord?" demanded Charles of Montsoreau.

The duke nodded his head, and the young nobleman sprang up the stairs, and, guided by one of the servants, found the watchman, who had been placed at the top of the house to report from time to time whatever occurrences of importance he might perceive in the neighbouring streets. All the information the man could give, however, was, that he had seen a party separate from the rest of the people almost immediately after the queen's entrance; that they seemed to be taking great care of some person in the midst of them, who, he fancied, had been hurt by the kicking and plunging of a horse which he had remarked hard by. The party had turned the corner of the street without attracting his attention farther; but, he added, that a moment or two afterward he thought he had heard a shrill cry coming from the direction which they had taken.

With such tidings only, and with his heart more agitated than ever, Charles of Montsoreau returned to the duke, who was still standing gloomily by the queen, who on her part looked up at his dark and frowning countenance with a degree of calmness which did not seem quite so natural as she could have wished.

"Whatever has happened, my lord duke," she said, after listening to the young nobleman's report, "whatever has happened, on my honour, on my salvation, I have had no share in it; and I promise you most solemnly not to rest a moment till I have discovered what has become of your ward, and have made you acquainted therewith. If she be in the court of my son, I make bold to say that she shall be instantly restored to you: but I cannot believe that it is so, as it is impossible for Villequier to have passed those barriers without being torn to pieces by the people."

Still the duke remained thinking gloomily without making any answer. "Logères," he said at length, "I must trust you with this business, for I have more matters to deal with than I can well compass. From what you said just now, and from what the boy Ignati told me, I know how you stand with our poor Marie. You know what I said, and what I promised long ago. Seek

her, find her, and wed her! Monsieur de St. Paul will tell you where your own men are: take her wherever you find her; by force, if it be necessary; and if any man, calling himself a gentleman, oppose you, cleave him to the jaws. I will bear you out in whatever you do: there is my signet: but stay; you had better see Marteau Chapelle and Bussi about it. They know every house in Paris, and I can spare them now from other affairs: bid them go with you and aid you; and tell Chapelle— What is it now, Brissac! You look confounded and alarmed."

"The news I have will confound your highness also, I am sure," replied Brissac; "to alarm you is not possible, I fancy. I have just received intelligence from the Porte de Nesle, my lord, that the king has quitted Paris, and taken the road to Chartres!"

The Duke of Guise turned towards Catharine de Medicis, and gazed upon her sternly, saying, "You have done this, madam! You amuse me while you destroy me!"*

"I have done this, cousin of Guise," replied the queen, "and I have done wisely for all parties. I have removed from you a great temptation to do an evil action; a temptation which I saw that you yourself feared; and, while I have removed that danger from you, my advice has put my son in safety."

"Madam," replied the duke, "I felt no temptation: my resolution was firm, positive, and unshaken; and, had I chosen to compromise the king's safety, or do wrong to his legitimate authority, the Louvre would have been invested six hours ago, for the people were already on their march if I had not stopped them. I wonder that he escaped in safety, however, for they are very much infuriated at the sight of these soldiers."

"He walked from the Louvre," replied Brissac, "on foot to the Tuileries, I hear, followed by some half dozen gentlemen; he then mounted his horse in the stables, and rode out suddenly; but it is said that they fired at him from the Porte de Nesle. The people, however, as they hear it, are becoming quite furious, and I fear that we shall not be able to keep them from massacring the soldiery."

"You see, madam," replied the Duke of Guise, still thinking alone of the king's escape, "you see, madam,

* I have given the duke's own words without variation.

to what danger the king has exposed himself. Had he remained in Paris no evil could have befallen him. He was safe, on my life and on my honour."

"I believe you, cousin of Guise, I believe you," replied the queen, who thought she saw that the tone of the Duke of Guise was not quite so peremptory as it had been while the king had seemed entirely in his power. "But now, in order to prove your good will entirely, let me beseech you to exert yourself to save the unhappy men who have been placed in such a situation of danger."

"That shall soon be done, madam," replied the duke; "and, as soon as this is done, I too must take means for finding my ward. In the mean time, madam, I will beseech you to use such measures at the court as may ensure that the people of Paris, and of the realm in general, shall not be driven again to such acts as these; remembering that, as you warned me not long ago, popularity is the most transient of all things, and that mine may not last long enough to save the state a second time from the dangers that menace it."

"I understand you, cousin of Guise, I understand you," replied the queen. "It may not last long enough, or it may not be willingly exerted: but I give you my promise that everything shall be done to content you, and with that view I have already demanded that the insolent, greedy, and ambitious Epemon shall be banished from the court, and stripped of his plundered authority. But hark!" she continued, "I hear the firing recommence. Wait not for farther words or for any ceremonies; I will find my way back to the Louvre without difficulty. Go, my lord, go at once, and save the poor Swiss from the fury of the people!"

The duke bowed low, took up his hat and sword, and without other arms walked out into the streets.

CHAPTER XI.

Passing out by the rooms belonging to the porter instead of by the Porte Cochère, the Duke of Guise, followed by a number of his officers, presented himself to the people on the steps which we have already noticed.

The moment he appeared, the whole street rang with acclamations, a path was instantly opened for him through the midst of the people, and, mounting his horse, he rode on, the barricades opening before him, as if by magic, wherever he came, and the people rending the air with acclamations of his name.

From time to time he stopped as he went, either bending down his proud head to speak to some of those whom he knew, or addressing the general populace in the neighbourhood of the different barriers, exhorting them to tranquillity, and beseeching, commanding, and entreating them to desist from all attacks upon the soldiery. His words spread like lightning from mouth to mouth; and though he went in person to several of the different points where the unequal contest was actively going on, the assault upon the troops was stopped in other quarters also by the mere report of his wishes.

Thus, as it were in triumph, totally unarmed amid the armed multitude, he went, ruling their furious passions as if by some all-powerful charm. The most violent, the most exasperated, the most sullen, uttered not one word in opposition to his will, and showed nothing but promptness and zeal in executing his commands. Before he reached the Place de Grève even, towards which his course was directed, the screams, the cries, the shouts, the firing, had ceased in every part of Paris, and nothing was heard throughout that wide capital but the rending shouts of joy with which the multitude accompanied him on his way.

On entering the Place de Grève, the duke looked sternly up at the windows of the Hôtel de Ville, but did not enter the building. He said, however, speaking to those immediately surrounding him, "A week shall not have elapsed before we have cleared that house of the vermin that infest it; and the people shall be freed from those who have betrayed them."

Then dismounting from his horse, and ascending the steps leading to the elevated space called the Perron of the Hôtel de Ville, he lifted his hat from his head for a moment, as a sign that he wished to address the people. All was silent in an instant; and then were heard the full, rich, deep tones of that eloquent voice, pouring over the heads of the multitude, and reaching the very farthest parts of the square.

"My friends and fellow-citizens," he said, "you

have this day acquired a great and glorious victory. You have triumphed over the efforts of despotic power, exerted, I am sure, not by the king's own will and consent, but by the evil counsels, and altogether by the evil efforts, of minions, speculators, and traitors. The real merit of those who win great victories and achieve great deeds is ascertained more by the way in which they use their advantages, than by the way in which those advantages have been gained. Were you a mean, degraded, unthinking race of men, who had been stirred up by oppression into objectless revolt, you would now content yourselves with wreaking your vengeance on a few pitiable and unhappy soldiers, who, in obedience to the commands which they have received, have been cast into the midst of you, like criminals of old, given up naked to a hungry lion. But you are not such people; you have great objects before you; you know and appreciate the mighty purposes for which you have fought and conquered; and, though driven by self-defence to resist the will of the king, you are still men to venerate and respect the royal authority; and even while you determine, for his sake as well as for your own, never to rest satisfied till the Catholic Church is established beyond the power of heretics to shake; till the court is freed from the minions and evil counsellors that infect it; till the finances of the state are collected and administered by a just and a frugal hand; and till the whole honours, rewards, and emoluments of the country are no longer piled upon one man—though you are determined to seek for and obtain all this, nevertheless, I know you are not men to trench in the least upon the royal authority farther than your own security requires, or to injure the royal troops whom you have conquered when they are no longer in a situation to do you wrong. You will remember, I am sure, that they are our fellow-Christians and our fellow-men, and you will treat them accordingly. I have therefore," he said, "requested my friends and fellow-labourers in your cause, Monsieur de Brissac and Monsieur de St. Paul, to conduct hither in safety the French and Swiss troops from the different quarters in which they have been dispersed. Their arms will be brought hither by our own friends; and in the manner which we shall deal with these two bodies of soldiery, I trust that we shall meet still with the approbation of our brethren."

While thus speaking, the Duke of Guise had been interrupted more than once by the applauses of the people, and in the end loud and reiterated acclamations left no doubt that all he chose to do would receive full support from those who heard him.

While he was yet speaking—according to the orders which he had given as he came along—the arms of the Swiss and French guards were brought in large quantities, by different bodies of the citizens: some carrying them in handbarrows, some bearing them upon their shoulders; and it was a curious sight to see men and boys, and even women, loaded with morions, and pikes, and swords, and arquebuses, bringing them forward through the crowd, and piling them up before the princely man who stood at the top of the steps, surrounded by many of the noblest and most distinguished gentlemen in France.

This sight occupied the people for some minutes, and then a cry ran through the square of “The Swiss! the Swiss!” The announcement caused some agitation among the populace; and some, forgetting that the soldiery were disarmed, unslung their carbines or half drew their swords, as if to resist a new attack. The discomfited soldiers, however, came on in a long line, two abreast, now totally disarmed, and seeming by their countenances yet uncertain of the fate that awaited them. With some difficulty a space was made for them in the Place de Grève, and, being drawn up in two lines, the duke commanded them to take their arms, but not their ammunition. Two by two they advanced to the pile; and each man, as far as possible, selected his own, when it appeared, to use the words of the Duke of Guise himself, when recounting the events of that day to Bassompierre, that there never had been such complete obedience among so agitated a multitude; for not one sword, morion, pike, or arquebus, of all the Swiss and French there present, was found to be wanting.*

When all was complete, the Duke of Guise turned to the soldiery, saying in a loud and somewhat stern tone, “The people of Paris, considering that you have acted under the commands of those you have sworn to obey, permit you for this once to retire in safety from the

* This extraordinary fact reminds us of days not long passed.

perilous situation in which you have been placed; but as there are points which make a considerable difference between the Swiss troops in the pay of France and the French troops themselves, there must be a difference also in their treatment. The Swiss, as foreigners, could have no motive or excuse for refusing to obey the commands imposed upon them; the French had to remember their duty to their country and to their religion. The Swiss, therefore, we permit to march out with colours flying and arms raised; the French will follow them, with their arms reversed and their colours furled."

A loud shout from the people answered this announcement; for throughout the course of that eventful day the Swiss had acted with moderation and discipline, whereas the licentious French soldiery had, during the early morning, while they thought themselves in possession of the capital, displayed all the brutal insolence of triumphant soldiery.

The Duke of Guise spoke a few words to Brissac and to St. Paul, and those two officers put themselves at the head, Brissac of the Swiss, and St. Paul of the French guards. Each held a small cane in his hand, and with no other arms they led the two bands from barrier to barrier through the city, till they were safe within the precincts of the Louvre.

Scarcely had these two parties quitted the Place de Grève, however, drawing a number of people from that spot, when information was brought to the duke that there were still two bands of soldiers in the city, one in the Cemetery of the Innocents, and one under the Chatelet, but both threatened by the people with instant destruction.

"We must make our way thither quickly," said the duke; "for, if I remember right, it is the band of Du Gas which is at the Chatelet, and the people are furious against him."

He accordingly lost not a moment on the way; but, turning to Bois-dauphin, who accompanied him, he said in a low tone, as they went, "I would have given my left hand to stay and examine the interior of the Hôtel de Ville, in order to punish some of the traitors who, I know, are lurking there. Perhaps it is better, however, to let them escape than that any mischief should be done; and in these popular movements, if we once

begin to shed blood; there is no knowing where it will end."

"I fear there is bloodshed going on at present," said Bois-dauphin, hearing a shot or two fired at no great distance. "They are at it under the Chatelet now."

"Hurry on! hurry on!" said the duke, speaking to some of those behind. "Run on fast before, and announce that I am coming. Command them, in my name, to stop."

Two or three of his followers ran forward, and no more shots were heard; but scarcely two minutes after, just as the duke had passed one of the barricades, he saw two or three men hurrying up to him, led by Chapelle Marteau, who approached him with no slight expression of grief and apprehension in his countenance.

"I fear I have bad news for you, my lord," he said.

"What is it?" demanded the duke, calmly. "Such a day as this could hardly pass over without some alloy."

"I fear," replied the Leaguer, "that your highness's friend, Monsieur de Logères, is mortally wounded. He brought me your signet and orders, which I immediately obeyed. We gained information which led us to suppose that the persons we sought for were concealed in a house in the Rue de la Ferronière here hard by. We proceeded thither instantly and demanded admission; but they, affecting to take us for a party of soldiery, fired upon us from the window, when two shots struck the count, one lodging in his shoulder, and the other passing through his body. He is yet living, and I have ordered him to be conveyed to the Hôtel de Guise at once, where a surgeon can attend upon him. Our people were breaking into the house to take the murderers prisoners, when, hearing of your approach, I came away to tell you the facts."

The Duke of Guise paused, and gazed sadly down upon the ground, repeating the words, "Poor youth! poor youth! so are his bright hopes cut short! He shall be avenged at least! Show me the house, Chapelle."

And he followed rapidly upon the steps of the Leaguer, who led him to a small house, with the entrance, which was through a Gothic arch, sunk somewhat back from the other houses. There were two windows above the arch, and a window which flanked it on either side; but the followers of the young Count of

Logères and of Chapelle Marteau had by this time broken open the doors, and rushed into the building.

"This is part of the old priory of the Augustins," said the Duke of Guise, as they came up. "They exchanged it some fifty years ago for their house farther down. But there are two or three back ways out; I know; and, if you have not put a guard there, they have escaped you."

It proved as the duke anticipated. The house was found completely vacant; and though strict orders were sent to all the different gates to suffer no one to pass out without close examination, either the order came too late, or those against whom it was levelled proved too politic for the guards; for none of those whom the Duke of Guise wished to secure, except Perense, the Prévôt des Marchands, were taken in the attempt to escape.

The shots, the sound of which Guise had heard, proved to be those which had struck the unfortunate Count de Logères, and no difficulty was found in inducing the people who surrounded the soldiery near the Chatelet to suffer them to depart, as their companions had done.

On entering the Cemetery of the Innocents, however, the duke instantly saw that the danger of the troops was greater; for, shut up in those walls, together with the Swiss, he found the famous Baron de Biron and Pomponne de Bellievre, while the people without were loudly clamouring for their blood. They both advanced towards him as soon as he appeared; and the duke, gazing around him, said with a sigh, "Alas, Monsieur de Biron! those who stirred up this fire should have been able to extinguish it."

"I say so too, my lord," replied Biron, sadly. "Evil be to those who gave the counsel that has been followed. God knows I opposed it to the utmost of my power, and only obeyed the king's absolute commands in bringing these poor fellows hither, who, I fear, will never be suffered to pass out as they came."

"For the soldiery I have no fear," replied the duke; "and as for you, gentlemen, I must do the best that I can. But the people look upon you as partially authors of the evil, and they will not be easily satisfied."

The Duke of Guise, however, succeeded, though not without difficulty, in his purpose of saving all. The

people yielded to him, but for the first time showed some degree of resistance; and he returned to the Hôtel de Guise feeling more sensibly, from that little incident, the truth of the warning which Catharine de Medicis had given him regarding the instability of popularity, than from all the arguments or examples that history or reason could produce.

We may easily imagine the reception of the duke in his own dwelling; the joy, the congratulations, the inquiries; and we may imagine, also, the passing of that busy night, while messengers were coming to and fro at every instant, and couriers were despatched from the Hôtel de Guise to almost every part of France.

Henry of Guise was well aware, that whatever deference and humility he might assume in his words towards the king, or whatever testimonies of forgiveness and affection Henry might offer to him, his own safety now, for the rest of his life, depended on his power, and that his armour must be the apprehensions of the king rather than his regard.

Up to a very late hour, notwithstanding all the fatigues and agitations of the day, he sat with his secretary Pericard, writing letters to all his different friends in various parts of the country, demanding their immediate assistance and support, even while he expressed the most devoted attachment to the king; and thus, in the letter we have already cited to Bassompierre, he makes use of such expressions as the following:

"Thus it is necessary that you should make a journey here to see your friends, whom you will not find, thank God! either wanting in means or resolution. We must have good intelligence from Germany, however, that we be not taken by surprise. We are not without forces, courage, friends, or means; but still less without honour, or respect and fidelity to the king, which we will preserve inviolably, doing our duty as people of worth, of honour, and as good Catholics."

It was about twelve o'clock at night when Reignant, the surgeon, entered the cabinet of the duke, and, bowing low, said, "I come, according to your highness's order, to tell you the state of the young Count of Logères. Soon after I saw you, about six to-day, we extracted both balls. He bore the operation well, and has slept since for several hours."

"Is he sleeping still?" demanded the duke.

"No," replied the surgeon. "He awoke about a quarter of an hour ago, and seems anxious to see your highness. He questioned me closely as to his state, when I told him the truth."

"You did right, you did right," replied the duke. "He is one that can bear it. What is your real opinion, Reignaut, in regard to the result?"

"I can hardly tell your highness," replied the surgeon. "Two or three days more are necessary before we can judge. The wound in the shoulder is not dangerous, though the most painful. The shot which passed through his body, and lodged in the back, is one which we generally consider mortal; but then, in ordinary cases, death either takes place almost immediately, or indications of such a result are seen in an hour or two, as to leave no farther doubt on the subject. No such indications have appeared here, and it may have happened that the ball has passed through without touching any vital part. We must remember, also," he continued, "that the wound was received when the moon was in her first quarter, which is, of course, very favourable; and we shall also, if there be any chance of life being saved, have made some progress towards recovery before any crisis is brought on by the moon reaching the full."

The duke listened attentively; for though such things may appear to us, in the present day, mere foolishness, that was not the case two centuries and a half ago, and the power of the moon, in affecting the wounded or sick, was never questioned. "Stay, Reignaut," said the duke, "I will go with you and see this good youth. I love him much; there is a frankness in his nature that wins upon the heart. Besides, he has saved my life, and has come to my aid on all occasions, as if there were a fate in it; and I believe, moreover, that he loves me personally as much, nay, perhaps more, than any of my own family and relations."

Thus saying, the duke rose, and, followed by Reignaut, passed through the door of his cabinet into the anteroom. His pages instantly presented themselves to light him on his way, and traversing some of the long corridors of the vast building he inhabited, he reached the chamber where his unhappy friend lay stretched upon the bed of pain and sickness. The boy Ignati sat beside him, tending him with care and affection; and at

the foot of the bed, with his arms crossed upon his chest, stood his faithful servant Gondrin, with tears in his eyes.

The duke seated himself by the young count, and remained with him for nearly an hour; and knowing well what effect the mind has upon the body, spoke to him cheerfully and hopefully of the time to come, talked of his recovered health as a thing certain, and mentioned his union with Marie de Clairvaut as beyond all doubt.

"It is upon that subject, my lord," said the young gentleman, "that I wished particularly to speak with your highness. I have not had either time or opportunity of telling you all that has occurred since I left you at Soissons. But from all I have heard, I now judge better in regard to the situation of Mademoiselle de Clairvaut than even you can. Nay, Monsieur Reignaut, I must speak a few words, but I will be as brief and as prudent as possible. In this business, my lord, suspect not the queen. It is not in her hands that Mademoiselle de Clairvaut will be found. Neither is she with Villequier, depend upon it; nor in the power of the king. I grieve to say it, but I feel sure my own brother has something to do with the events of this day as far as they affect her so dear to me."

"But you surely do not think," exclaimed the duke, "that it is your brother's hand which inflicted these wounds upon you?"

"The ball would be poisoned, indeed, my lord," replied Charles of Montsoreau, "if I did believe such to be the case. But I trust it is not so; most sincerely do I trust—ay, and believe—it is not so. There is another hand, my lord duke; and not long ago I could as well have believed that my own father's would have been raised against me as the one of which I speak. But still there is another hand, my lord, which—actuated by motives dark and evil—I believe to have been raised against my life. That hand is in general unerring in its aim; and, the moment before the shot was fired, I saw the calm cold features, which I know so well, at the window just above me."

"But whose is the hand?" exclaimed the duke. "Whose are the features that you mean?"

"I mean those of the Abbé de Boisguerin, my lord," replied the count; "and to him, to him, I think, your highness must look even rather than to my brother. I

believe Gaspar but to be a tool in his hands, and that he uses him for his own dark and criminal designs."

"Have I not heard you say he was your tutor?" demanded the duke. "What, then, are his motives! what can be his inducements!"

"Love, my lord," replied Charles of Montsoreau. "I have the word of that sweet girl for his having dared to use words towards her for which he deserves and must meet with punishment. Him I would point out to your highness as the person to be watched, and sought for, and made to account for all his actions; for, depend upon it, his are the machinations which are ruling these events."

"He shall not be forgotten!" replied the duke. "He shall not be forgotten! But now, Logères, speak no more, except indeed only to answer me one question. I have heard that the county of Morly has lately fallen to you by the death of the old count. These, with the estates of Logères, if properly conducted, may afford me great assistance. You are incapable for the time of directing them at all. Do you authorize me to fill your post, and give orders in your name till you are better?"

"Most willingly, my lord," replied Charles of Montsoreau. "I had already thought of it. But your highness talks of my becoming better: I have thought of that matter too, but in a different light; and considering what may take place in case of my own death, I have requested Monsieur Reignaut here to cause a will to be drawn up, leaving the whole that I possess to the person whom I love best on earth, with your highness for her guardian. There are a few gifts bestowed on those that love me, and a provision for all old servants: but—"

"But it will not be wanted, Logères," said the duke, pressing his hand. "I see it in your eye; I hear it in the tone of your voice. You will recover and strike by my side yet; perhaps in many a well-fought field. Silence and perfect quiet, I know, are Monsieur Reignaut's best medicines; but I shall come to you, from time to time, when I have got any pleasant tidings to bear."

CHAPTER XII.

WE must now pass over a considerable lapse of time, without taking any note of the political intrigues with which it was occupied, and lead the reader at once from the month of May to the end of summer, and from the city of Paris to the distant town of Angoulême.

Under the high hill on which that city stands, at the distance of about a league from the base, was in those days a beautiful park, with a pavilion of four towers; and in one of these towers, on a fine summer day towards the end of July, sat the young Marquis of Montsoreau, together with the Abbé de Boisguerin: not exactly in conversation, for the marquis had not spoken a word for nearly an hour; but in dull companionship.

The young nobleman's back was turned towards the light, his eyes were bent down upon the ground, his head drooped forward in a desponding attitude, the nostril was painfully expanded, as if he drew his breath with difficulty, and the teeth were tight shut, as it were to keep down some struggling emotions that swelled for utterance. An open letter lay upon the table, and another much more closely written, and written in cipher, was in the hand of the Abbé de Boisguerin. The abbé's brow, too, was a good deal contracted, and his lip was somewhat pale, though it quivered not; but from time to time he addressed the young nobleman with words of consolation, regarding some afflicting tidings just received.

Those words, however, though well chosen, appropriate, and elegant, were not of the words that console, for they were not of the heart. He reasoned logically on the inutility of human grief, and still more on the vanity of regretting that which could not be recalled. He spoke lightly of all deep feelings for any earthly thing, and he talked of every deed upon the face of the earth being justified by the importance of the objects to be obtained.

When he had talked thus for some time without obtaining any answer, he was going to justify the past; but Gaspar de Montsoreau suddenly started up, and in-

interrupted him with a vehemence which he had never displayed before.

"Abbé de Boisguerin," he said, "talk not to me of consolation and of comfort. Is not my brother dead? Is not my brother dead, killed by my own hand? Can you tear that from the book of fate? Can you blot it out from memory? Can you rase it for ever from the records of crimes done? Can you find me a pillow on all the earth where I can lay my head in peace?"

"Your brother, indeed, is dead," said the Abbé de Boisguerin, without in the least degree trying to relieve the mind of his young companion from the crime with which conscience charged him. "Your brother, indeed, is dead; and it is not to be denied that your hand, my dear Gaspar, took his life; but yet you were in a city where war was actually going on between two parties, one of which you served, and the other your brother. These things have happened every day in civil wars, and always will happen. They are to be grieved at, but who can help them?"

"But I was engaged in no civil wars," exclaimed the young marquis. "My men were at the Louvre. I was not fighting on the part of the king: I was not engaged in trampling down the people. But what was I busied with, Abbé de Boisguerin? I was engaged in a scheme for carrying off—from him she loved, and from those who had a right to protect her—one whom I had no title to control, whom I was bound by honour to guard and to defend. I was injuring her; I was preparing to injure her. If I had not lied to her myself, I had caused her to be deceived and lied to; and all that I had previously done made the act itself which I had committed but the more hateful. Speak not to me of consolation, abbé; speak not to me of hope or comfort. You, of all men, do not venture to mention to me a word like happiness or confidence."

"And why not, my lord?" demanded the abbé, somewhat sternly. "What have I done to merit reproach in the matter?"

"Has it not been you that have prompted me through-out?" demanded the marquis. "Was it not you who devised the scheme, prepared the means, got possession of the queen's letter by corrupting her servants. Was it not your tool, that, upon pretence of assisting her to the other gates of the hotel, got her into our power;

and was it not you, when her prayers, and entreaties, and agitation would have made me yield, was it not you that resisted, and remorselessly bade the men carry her on! Did you not yourself stand by me when the shot was fired; and was it not your warning, that disgrace and death must follow hesitation, which winged the ball that took my brother's life!"

"It is all true, Gaspar," replied the Abbé de Boisguerin, in a sad but no longer a harsh tone. "It is all true; and from you I meet the reward which all men will meet and well deserve who love others better than themselves, and who do for them things that they would not do for themselves. Nevertheless, I still think that there was not that evil on our side with which you seem to reproach yourself. Shocked and mourning for your brother's death, you see all things in dark and gloomy colours. Those things which you regarded before as light, have now become to you heavy and sombre as night. But all this is but mood; and let me call to your remembrance what sense and reason say. You and your brother loved the same person; you vehemently, warmly, devotedly, he coldly and by halves. You, as the elder brother and as lord of the dwelling in which she was received, had, if anything, the first claim upon her; and he himself rendered that claim still greater, by leaving her entirely to you, and absenting himself from her. You had every right, therefore, to seek her hand by all means; and when you found that, though he affected generous forbearance, he had gone covertly to forestall your demand and gain the promise of her hand from her guardian, surely you were bound to keep no measures with him. All I did subsequently was to serve you in a cause that I thought was right, and it is but a few days ago that you were grateful to me for so doing. I said at the time, and I say again, that if at the moment when your brother commenced his attack upon the house in the Rue de la Ferronnière, either you or I had been taken, death and eternal disgrace would have been the consequence. We acted but in our own defence, and those who assailed us cannot accuse us for so acting."

Gaspar de Montsoreau heard him in sullen silence, his dark eyes rolling from side to side beneath his heavy eyebrows. In his dealings with the Abbé de Boisguerin he had by this time learned fully how artful

and politic was the man who led him. He saw it, and he could not doubt it, even while he shared in the things at which his better spirit revolted. But that very knowledge taught him to doubt, whether the art and the policy were used for his service, and out of affection to him, or whether they were all directed in some secret way to the benefit of him who wielded them so dexterously. The suspicions which Villequier had instilled rose fresh in his mind at this very time; and, as his only answer to the abbé's reasonings, he demanded with a keen glance and a sharp tone, "Tell me, abbé, was it, or was it not, you who brought the reiters upon us, and who gave the king's forces notice of our passage?"

"I did the one, but not the other," replied the abbé, calmly. "I dealt not with the reiters, Gaspar de Montsoreau, for that would have been dangerous to me, to her, and to you. But I did inform the troops of the king, because I already learned how deeply the Duke of Guise was pledged to your brother; because I knew that no reasoning would prevent either you or this fair girl from going on to Soissons; and because I saw that there was no earthly chance of your obtaining her hand, but by placing her under the charge of her father's nearest male relation, from whom the Duke of Guise unjustly withholds the guardianship. I own it, I acknowledge it, I am proud of it."

The way in which the abbé replied was not such as Gaspar de Montsoreau had expected; but, dissatisfied with himself, and, of course, with everything else, Gaspar de Montsoreau still gazed sullenly on the floor, and then raised his eyes to the open window of the pavilion, where the warm sun was seen streaming through the green vines, with the birds still singing sweetly in the woods without. But it was all to him as the face of Eden to our first parents after the fall; a shade seemed to come over his eyes when he looked upon the loveliness of nature; the very sunshine seemed to him darkness, and the fair world a desert.

"Can you give me back my delight in that sunshine?" he said, after a pause. "Can you make the notes of those birds again sound sweet to my ear? Can you remove the heavy, heavy burden of remorse from this heart? Can you ever, ever prove to me, that for this unrequited love I have not made myself a guilty

wretch, bearing the sin of Cain upon his brow, the curse of Cain within his bosom!"

"If such be your feelings," replied the abbé, "if such—contrary to all justice and reason—is the state in which your mind is to remain, there is one way that will alleviate and sooth you, that may seem in your eyes some atonement, and put your conscience more at rest. Cast off this love which you believe has led you into evil; yield the pursuit of this fair girl; renounce the object for which you did that whereof your heart reproaches you, and, by that voluntary punishment and self-command, do penance for aught in which you may have failed. Doubtless that penance will be severe and terrible to endure; but, the more it is so, the greater is the atonement."

The marquis gazed him in the face thoughtfully while the abbé spoke, and then fell into a long revery. His brow was raised and depressed, his teeth gnawed his nether lip, his hand clinched and opened with the struggle that was going on within, and at length, stamping his heel upon the ground, he exclaimed, "No, no, no! I have paid a mighty price, and I will have the jewel that I have bought with my soul's salvation! That fiery love is the only thing now left me upon earth. She shall be mine, or I will die! What is there that shall stop me now? What is there that shall hinder me? Have I not wealth, and power, and courage, and strength, and daring, and determination! The fear of crime! the fear of crime! that weak barrier is cast down and trampled under my feet. Have I not broken the nearest and the dearest ties of kindred and affection, murdered the brother that hung on the same breast, dimmed the eyes that looked on me in infancy, frozen the warm heart that was cradled in the same womb with mine? Out upon it! What is there should stop me now! The lesser crimes of earth, the smaller violences, seem ground into unseen dust by this greater crime. Abbé, I will buy her of Villequier! I know how to win him! I will force her to love me, or she shall hate her husband! What is there shall stop me now? I will buy the priest as well as the ring or the wedding garment; and she shall be mine, whether her heart be mine or not!"

While he spoke the Abbé de Boisguerin gazed upon him with one of his calm dark smiles; but upon the

present occasion that smile upon the lip was at variance with a slight frown upon his brow. He replied little, however, saying merely, "It is so, Gaspar! It is so, that men seek to enjoy the fruit, and yet regret the means. They will never find happiness thus, however."

"Happiness!" exclaimed the marquis, with a look of agony upon his face. "Is there such a thing as happiness! Oh yes, there is, and I once knew it, when, together with that brother who is now no more, and you also, my friend, undisturbed by stormy passions, content with that I had, blessed with the only friendship and affection that was needful to content, I passed the sunny hours in sport and joy, and scarcely knew the common pains incident to man's general nature. And you have aided to destroy this state, and you have helped to drive me forth from happiness, to blot it out so entirely that I could almost forget it ever existed."

"No, no, Gaspar of Montsoreau!" exclaimed the abbé, quickly, "I have not done any of these things you talk of. I have not aided in any one degree to take from you the happiness you formerly had. There is but one secret for the preservation of happiness, Gaspar. It matters not what is the object of desire, for anything that we thirst for really may give us happiness in nearly the same proportion as another. Happiness is gained by the right estimation of the means. If a man ever uses means that he regrets, to obtain any object that he desires, he loses the double happiness which may be obtained in life, the happiness of pursuit and the happiness of enjoyment. Every means must, of course, be proportioned to its end; where much is to be won, much must be risked or paid: but the firm strong mind, the powerful understanding, weighs the object against the price; and, if it be worthy, whatever that price may be, after it is once paid and the object attained, regrets not the payment. It is like an idle child, who covets a gilt toy, spoils it in half an hour, and then regrets the money it has cost, ever to sorrow over means we have used when those means have proved successful. Say not, Gaspar, that I disturbed your happiness! While you were in your own hands, enjoying the calm pleasures of a provincial life, knowing no joys, seeking no pleasures but those which, like light winds that ruffle the surface and plough not up the bosom of the water; amuse the mind but never agitate the heart, I lived

contented and happy among you, believing that, but once or twice at most in the life of man, a joy is set before him which is worthy of being bartered against amusement. I joined in all your sports, I furnished you with new sources of the same calm pleasures; and, as long as I saw the passions were shut out, I sought no change for myself or for you either. But when the moment came that strong and deep passions were to be introduced; when I saw that your heart, and that of your brother, like the moulded figure by the demigod, had been touched with the ethereal fire, and woke from slumber never to sleep again, then it was but befitting that I should aid him who confided in me in the pursuit that he was now destined to follow. If the object was a great and worthy one, the means to obtain it were necessarily powerful and hazardous. No man ought to yield his repose for anything that is not worth all risks; but, having once begun the course, he must go on; and weak and idle is he who cannot overleap the barriers that he meets with, or, when the race is won, turns to regret this flower or that which he may have trampled down in his course."

"You are harsh, abbé," replied the marquis, thoughtfully, somewhat shaken by his words; for though the wounds of remorse admit no balm, they are sometimes forgotten in strong excitement. "You are harsh, but yet it is a terrible thing to have slain one's brother."

"It is," replied the abbé; "but circumstances give the value of every fact. It is a terrible thing to slay any human being: to take the life of a creature, full of the same high intelligences as ourselves: but if I slay that man in a room, and for no purpose, it is called murder; if I slay him in a battle-field, in order to obtain a crown, it is a glorious act, and worthy of immortal renown."

The marquis listened to his sophistry, eager to take any theme of consolation to his heart. But any one who heard him would have supposed that the Abbé de Boisguerin thought his companion too easily consoled. Perhaps it might be that the abbé himself sought to defend his share in the transaction rather than to give any comfort to his unhappy cousin. At all events, after a brief pause, during which both fell into thought, he added, "What I grieve the most for is, that Charles was kind-hearted and generous, frank and true, and I believe

sincerely that, but for this unhappy business, he loved us both."

"Ay, there is the horror! there is the horror!" exclaimed the marquis, casting himself down into a chair, and covering his eyes with his hands. "He did love me, I know he did; and I believe he sought to act generously by me."

The abbé suffered him to indulge in his grief for a moment or two, and then replied, "But the misfortune is, that, with all this, your object is not yet secured; that, though you have once more snatched her from the power of the Guises, you have not contrived to keep her in your own."

The marquis waved his hand impatiently, saying, "I cannot, I will not talk of such things now. Leave me, abbé, leave me! I can but grieve; there is no way that I can turn without encountering sorrow."

The abbé turned and left him; and, descending the steps into the gardens, he walked on in the calm sunshine as tranquilly as if purity and holiness had dwelt within his breast. "I must bear this yet a while longer," he said to himself. "But now, if I could find some enthusiastic priest, full of wild eloquence, such as we have in Italy, to seize this deep moment of remorse, we might do much to make him abjure this pursuit; perhaps abjure the world! The foolish boy thinks that it was his hand that did it, and does not know that I fired at all, when his hand shook so that he could not well have struck him. Perhaps there may be such a priest as I need up there," he continued, looking towards Angoulême; "perhaps there may be such a priest up there of the kind I want. Epernon has his fits of devotion too, I believe. At all events, I will go up and see. The madder the better for my purpose."

Thus saying, he called some servants, ordered his horse, and, as soon as it was brought, rode away towards Angoulême.

CHAPTER XIII.

GASPAR DE MONTMOREAU remained in the same position in which the abbé had left him for nearly an hour, and the struggle of the various passions which agitated his heart was perhaps as terrible as any that had ever been known to human being. His situation, indeed, was one which exposed him more than most men are ever exposed, to the contention of the most opposite feelings. He had not been led gradually on, as many are, step by step, to evil; but he had been taken from the midst of warm and kindly feelings, from the practice of right, and an habitual course of calm and tranquil enjoyment, and by the mastery of one strong and violent passion had been plunged into the midst of crimes which had left anguish and remorse behind them.

Still, however, the passion which had at first led him astray existed in all its fierceness and all its intensity; and, like some quiet field—from which the husbandman has been accustomed to gather yearly, in the calm sunshine, a rich and kindly harvest—when suddenly made the place of strife by contending armies, his heart, so tranquil and so happy not a year before, had now become the battle-place of remorse and love.

Sometimes the words of the abbé came back upon his ear, urging him to abandon for ever, as a penance for his crime, the pursuit which had already led him to such awful deeds; but then again the thought of Marie de Clairvaut, of never beholding that beautiful being again, of yielding her for ever, perhaps, to the arms of others, came across his brain, and almost drove him mad.

Then would rush remorse again upon his heart; the features of his brother rose up before him; his graceful form seemed to move within his sight; the frank, warm-hearted, kindly smile, that had ever greeted him when they met, was now painted by memory to his eye; and many a trait of generous kindness, many a noble, many an endearing act, the words and jests of boyhood and infancy, the long-remembered sports of early years, the

accidents, the adventures, the tender and twining associations of youth and happiness, forgotten in the strife of passion and the contention of rivalry, now came back as vividly as the things of yesterday; came back, alas! now that death had ended the struggle, rendered the deeds of the past irreparable, thrown the pall of remorse over the last few months, and left memory alone to deck the tomb of the dead with bright flowers gathered from their spring of life.

It was too much to bear: he turned back again to the words, not of consolation, but of incitement, which the abbé had spoken to him. He tried to think it was folly to regret what had been done; he tried to recollect that it was in a scene of contention and in moments of strife that his brother had fallen; he strove to persuade himself that Marie de Clairvaut had been under his care, and guidance, and direction, and that his brother Charles had had no right even to attempt to take her out of his hands. He laboured, in short, to steel his heart; to render it as hard as iron, in order to resist the things that it had to endure. He sought anxiously to rouse it into activity; and he tried to fix his mind still upon the thoughts of winning Marie de Clairvaut. He resolved, at whatever price, by whatever sacrifice, to gain her, to possess her, to make her his own beyond recall: with the eagerness of passion and the recklessness of remorse, he determined to pursue his course, trusting, as many have idly trusted, that he should induce the woman, whose affections and feelings he forced, to love the man to whose passions she was made a sacrifice.

The struggle was still going on, the voice of conscience was raising itself loudly from time to time, memory was doing her work, and passion was opposing all, when, without hearing any step, or knowing that any one had arrived at the house, he felt a hand quietly laid upon his arm; and, starting up with a feeling almost of terror, which was unusual to him, he beheld the dark and sinister, though handsome countenance of Villequier.

The courtier grasped his hand with enthusiastic warmth, and gazed in his face with a look of deep interest. "You are sad, Monsieur de Montsoreau," he said; "I grieve to see you so sad. I fear that the news which I came to break to you has been told you, perhaps, in a rash and inconsiderate manner. You are

aware, then, that your brother is no more. I hoped to have been in time, for I only heard it the day before yesterday, in the evening, from the Duke of Guise, who is now with the king, and, as you know; all powerful."

Gaspar de Montsoreau heard him to an end, and then merely bowed his head, saying, "I have heard all, Monsieur de Villequier." But, although he saw that his companion—who had more than once witnessed the fierceness of his feelings towards his brother regarding Mademoiselle de Clairvaut—was surprised at the deep grief he now betrayed, he dared not let him know how much that grief was aggravated by remorse, from the belief that his own hand had cut the thread of his brother's life.

"I am sorry, Monsieur de Montsoreau," added Villequier, "to see you so deeply affected by this matter. Pray remember, that though Monsieur de Logères was your brother, he was struggling with you for the hand of the person you love, and that his being now removed renders your hope of obtaining the hand of Mademoiselle de Clairvaut no longer doubtful and remote, but certain and almost immediate."

"I see not the matter in the same cheering light that you do, Monsieur de Villequier," replied Gaspar de Montsoreau, thoughtfully. "You say, and I hear also that it is so, that the Duke of Guise is now all powerful with the king; if such be the case, what results have we to anticipate? Do you think that the Duke of Guise will ever consent to the union of his ward with me? Do you think that, prejudging the question as he has already done, he will give me the bride that he promised to my brother? Have I not heard from those who were present, that he has sworn by all he holds sacred, that never, under any circumstances, should she be mine?"

"The Duke of Guise is not immortal," replied Villequier, dryly; "and his death leaves her wholly in my power. Should such an event not take place, however, and the period of her attaining free agency approach, we must risk a little, should need be, and employ a certain degree of gentle compulsion to drive or lead her to that which we desire."

"When will it be?" demanded Gaspar of Montsoreau. "Why should we pause? why should we risk anything by delay?"

"Hear me, my good young friend," replied Villequier. "They are not so slight as you imagine. In the first place, we have for some time held in France, that rash and troublesome persons, who oppose our progress or thwart our desires, are to be encountered for a certain time by the arts of policy, and by every soft and quiet inducement we may hold out to them. When we have been patient as long as possible, and find that they are not to be frustrated by any ordinary means, it becomes necessary to put a stop to their opposition, and to remove them from the way in which we are proceeding. Now the Duke of Guise has been very busily teaching a rash and troublesome persons, both high and low, that his prolonged patience is extremely inconvenient to them. Baron de Biron loves him; D'Aumont abominates him; D'O. wishes to wish him a step beyond Jerusalem; D'Esparre has in him a bitter enemy; the rash, impetuous, and foolish of Soissons an obstacle and a stumbling-block; though I am his humble servant, and the

king his very good friend, yet both Henry and myself could do quite as well without him. Besides these, there are at least ten thousand more in France who would walk with their beavers far more gallantly if there were a Guise the less in the world; so that I say, on very probable reasoning, that I would fally as soon reckon upon the life of a man of eighty, as I would upon the robust, powerful existence of Henry of Guise even for an hour. But, putting all that aside, Monsieur de Montsoreau, taking it for granted that he lives, what can I do but what I propose! You have the king's promise and mine in writing; we can do no more. The cause is before the Parliament; and Henry, restrained in his own court, at war with his own subjects, and driven from his own capital, depend upon it, will never sign your contract of marriage with Mademoiselle de Clairvaux till every other hope has failed; ay, and what is more, till he sees before him a very, very great object to be gained by so doing."

"A fresh object you mean, Monsieur de Villequier," replied Gaspar de Montsoreau. "I know that this is the way in which kings and statesmen deal with men less wise than themselves. There must be always one object secured to obtain the promise, and another to obtain the performance. Pray what is the new object, Monsieur de Villequier! and is it sure that, if an object be held out of sufficient worth and importance, the king will not find some specious reason for drawing back, or that some new and irresistible obstacle does not present itself?"

"Consider the king's situation, Monsieur de Montsoreau," replied Villequier; "with the Duke of Guise constantly at his side, dictating to him all his movements, with the question of guardianship even now lying before the Parliament, he would run the very greatest risk at this moment if he were to do as we both wish, and forcibly hurry on this business to a conclusion. But the aspect of affairs is changing every day; the Count of Soissons has come to join him; Henry of Navarre himself has sent him offers of assistance and support; Epemon, roused into activity, is levying forces in all parts of the country; every day the king may expect to make some way against the party of his adversaries; and, therefore, every day is something gained. But even were it not so very hazardous to attempt anything

of the kind at present, you could not expect the king to risk much, and embarrass his policy for your sake, without some individual motive. That this business should take place is your strong and intense desire. It is very natural that it should be so; but neither the king nor myself have any such feelings, passions, or wishes. Let us each have our advantage or our gratification in that which is to ensue, and I will undertake, and pledge myself in the most solemn manner, that Mademoiselle de Clairvaut shall be your wife before next Christmas-day."

Gaspar de Montsoreau paused, and thought carefully over all that had been said. "I thank you, Monsieur de Villequier," he said, "for speaking freely in this matter. Let us cast away all idle delicacy. Things have happened to me lately which have taught me to hold all such empty verbiage at naught. Let us look upon this business as a matter of dealing, a matter of merchandise."

"Exactly!" replied Villequier, raising his eyes slightly, but not seeming in the least degree offended. "Let us consider it in such a light. Every matter of policy is but trade upon a large scale."

"Well, then," continued Gaspar de Montsoreau, in the same bold tone, "I will look upon you and the king, Monsieur de Villequier, as two partners in a mercantile house. Now what sort of merchandise is it that you would prefer to have in barter for your signature to my marriage contract with this young lady. Shall it be money?"

"Money!" exclaimed Villequier, with a slight ironical smile playing about the corners of his mouth. "Have you any money? It is, indeed, a surprising thing to hear any one talk of money except the Duke of Guise or the Duke of Epemon. Why, Bellievre assures me, upon his honour, that the very despatch which he was ordered to send to Soissons, to forbid positively the Duke of Guise coming to Paris, was stopped, for what reason, think you? Because, when he took it down to the treasury, there was not found fifty livres to pay the courier's expenses. The courier would not go without money; Bellievre had none to give him; so, between them both, they carried the king's despatch to the post, and put it in with the common letters. The letters went to Rheims before they were sent to Soissons, and the

Duke of Guise was in Paris while the order to forbid him was on the road.* Money! Oh, certainly, money above all things! But pray do not let it be a large sum, lest, like an apoplectic epicure, the king's treasury and my purse die of sudden repletion."

"Well, then, Monsieur de Villequier," said the marquis, after taking one or two turns up and down the room, "I will tell you what I will do, to show you how dearly I hold the gift that is promised me. On the day of my marriage with Marie de Clairvaut, when it is all completed, the benediction said, the contract signed, your name as guardian, and the king's in confirmation attached, I will place in your hands the sum of one hundred crowns of the sun."

"Heavens and earth!" exclaimed Villequier, in the same tone in which he had spoken before, "I did not know that there was such a sum in France. If I were to tell it to Monsieur D'O., he would not believe me."

"But remember, Monsieur de Villequier," replied Gaspar of Montsoreau, not quite liking the levity of his companion's speech, "this is no jesting matter with me, whatever it may be with you; and I must have such sure and perfect warranty that you will not betray my hopes again, or ask for even the slightest farther delay, that there cannot be a doubt rest upon my mind; otherwise—"

"Otherwise what, Monsieur de Montsoreau!" demanded Villequier. "If we do not keep our words, you know we shall lose the great advantage that we hope to gain from you. That is the surest bond! Let the matter stand thus, sir, if this marriage do take place, as I have promised you it shall, the hundred thousand crowns of gold are paid; if not, we are the losers. I see no alternative beyond this."

"By heavens! but there is, and there shall be one," answered Gaspar de Montsoreau, impetuously. "I see that Monsieur de Villequier, who is supposed to count upon every chance and circumstance collateral and direct, has forgotten one or two points, although he has not forgotten that I am heir of my brother's lands, both of Logères and Morly. But I will only put him in mind

* This is historically true in regard to one of the despatches to the Duke of Guise; and in representing Henry and his courtiers as occasionally acting the part of low and mercenary swindlers, first fleeing and then laughing at a dupe, I am also borne out by facts.

of what might take place on either side. The king and Monsieur de Villequier might find obstacles of great import rise up against my wishes, or they might find greater advantages in some other quarter; they might think it worth while to keep me trifling in inactivity, or employ me in their service against the enemy. They might do all this, and then forego the sum named for a greater. I, on the other hand, Monsieur de Villequier, might see wavering and hesitation; I might grow tired of waiting and dependance; I might say to-morrow I have no certainty in this business, and I might give my banner to the wind, broider the cross of the League upon my breast, or assume the double cross of Lorraine, and either range the spears of Montsoreau and Logères in the ranks of the army of Mayenne, or, marching to Chartres, Tours, or Blois, might bow me lowly to my Lord of Guise, and, begging him to forget the past, swear myself his faithful servant."

Villequier gazed on him for a moment with certainly not the most friendly expression of countenance, and was about to speak; but the young marquis, conscious of his own importance, waved his hand, saying, "Nay, nay, Monsieur de Villequier! on all and on every account, the plan I am about to propose is the only one that can be followed. Of course, in dealing with his majesty, I cannot treat as crown to crown;" and he smiled somewhat bitterly. "But I must treat with you as gentleman to gentleman, and leave you to entreat his majesty—urgently and zealously, as I doubt not you will do it, to accede graciously to our views. Thus, then, shall it be, that you and the king shall enter into a bond with me, by which you will engage that Mademoiselle de Clairvaut shall, with the full consent of both parties, expressed by their signature to our marriage contract, become my wife on or before next Christmas-day, and in default shall be subject to amercement in whatsoever amount the Parliament of Paris may judge that I am damaged by the want of performance. This is merely to secure that the matter be explicit; and in the same bond may be placed my engagement to pay the sum named upon the fulfilment of the contract. This is fair, and only fair; and you know my last resolve."

"In truth, Monsieur de Montsoreau," replied Villequier, "if you but knew the state of our finances, you would see that we are far more likely to be so eager in

concluding this business as even to risk dangerous consequences, than to trifle with you in any degree."

He remembered the curious engagement that he had entered into with the Abbé de Boisguerin, and he paused a moment, in hopes that Gaspar de Montsoreau might show even the slightest sign of hesitation; but, so far from it, the frown deepened on the young nobleman's brow, and he replied sharply, "I will trust to no contingencies, Monsieur de Villequier. These are changing times, as you well know. The cross Fleurdelysée in your arms* may well be changed, by the golden billets dropped around it, into the cross of Lorraine. If what I have offered be as good as you say, there is no earthly reason why his majesty of France or yourself, Monsieur de Villequier, should object to enter into the engagement with me that I propose."

"Well," answered Villequier, "well, I must do my best with the king; but I dare say, Monsieur de Montsoreau," he said, in a lower voice, "I dare say you are well aware that a little compulsion, perhaps, must be used in this instance."

He thought he saw hesitation, and he went on the more eagerly, for he wished to avoid the written engagement. "I must be permitted to use what means I think fit to wring consent from the young lady herself. Nor must I have one word of objection on your part, whatever you see or hear; no asking for delay; no yielding to her tears. One word of such a kind, remember, vitiates the engagement on our part, but leaves you as strictly bound as ever."

Gaspar de Montsoreau gazed down upon the ground sternly for several moments, with his brows contracting, till his eyes were nearly hid beneath them. His fingers were seen to clasp into the palms of his hands, as if the nails would have buried themselves there. But, after a short and terrible struggle, the evil spirit maintained its ascendancy, and he exclaimed, "Be it so! Be it so! But, in the mean time, sir," he continued, abruptly, "there is one thing I have to demand. How have I been led with hopes, and meeting nothing but disappointments, for the last two months. I who dared all, and underwent all, to snatch her once more from the power of the Guises. When forced to fly, it was under your power and in your charge I left her; and

* Such were the arms of the Villequier family.

yet, though this is the fourth or fifth time that you and I have met, I have never been able to see her, or to learn distinctly where she is. This must be no longer, Monsieur de Villequier. I need consolation; I need comfort; the only comfort or consolation I can find is in her presence and in her society. Where is she? I demand to know where she is. I was brought to Angoulême by information that she was in the neighbourhood; but I cannot discover her, and I will be trifled with no longer."

"By all I hold sacred," exclaimed Villequier, not a little surprised by the bold and daring tone and decided manner which the young nobleman had so suddenly put on, "by all I hold sacred—"

"What is that, sir?" demanded Gaspar de Montsoreau.

Villequier smiled. "Oh, many things, Monsieur de Montsoreau," he answered; "I hold many things sacred. But with any oath or abjuration that you think most convenient, I assure you that Mademoiselle de Clairvaut is not under my charge, or in my power at this moment."

"But was so how long ago?" demanded the marquis.

"About a fortnight," replied Villequier, coolly. "The fact is, Monsieur de Montsoreau, that his high and mighty highness, the Duke of Guise, having come to pay a humble visit to his majesty—to congratulate him, I suppose, on being driven out of Paris—gave significant notice to the king, on their first interview at Chartres, that he believed Mademoiselle de Clairvaut to be in my hands, and that he would have her instantly delivered up. I was not present, you know, but everything passed as the Guises wished. I dare say you have heard all the rest; Epernon was banished, and fled to Angoulême here, stripped of his high posts and manifold emoluments; Guise was created generalissimo of the king's armies; in fact, Guise dictated the law to the king, and Henry was fain to forget all the past, or to cover the bitter memory with a jest."

"But to the point, to the point, Monsieur de Villequier," said the Marquis de Montsoreau. "What of Mademoiselle de Clairvaut?"

"Why, the king told me," replied Villequier, "that the duke demanded her at all events till the Parliament of Paris had decided our cause. The next day the duke

and I had an interview on the subject; but, ere that, I had placed her in the hands of a friend, and begged him to remove her for a time from the house where she then was. The duke was as imperious and unceremonious as an executioner. He vowed that I should give her up to him at once; and though we did our best to deceive him, exactly as we had done with your wild, thoughtless brother, the duke did not so easily believe us; and both I and the king were obliged to swear upon the mass that she was not in our power, and that we knew not where she was. That was easily done; but Henry's low laugh had nearly betrayed the whole; and the duke swore loudly and menaced high, that if he were deceived he would have vengeance."

"And now, Monsieur de Villequier," said the marquis, "where is she now? And who is the friend in whose hands you have placed her?"

Villequier paused for a single moment, as if to consider whether he should tell him or not. But a moment after he answered with a smile, "The friend in whose hands she is placed, Monsieur de Montsoreau, is one in whom at that time you yourself placed great confidence. I trust the same feelings exist still towards him. I mean the Abbé de Boisguerin."

Gaspar de Montsoreau started at the intelligence with feelings of angry dissatisfaction, which he could hardly account for to himself, but which he instantly strove to conceal from the keen eyes of the artful man with whom he was dealing. The exclamation of "Indeed!" however, which broke from his lips, was uttered in a tone which instantly showed Villequier that the tidings were by no means pleasing; and while he suffered the young marquis to digest them at leisure, he laid out in his own mind a plan for keeping the abbé and his former pupil at variance, not with any clear and definite object, indeed, but for the purpose of having a check upon the young marquis at any future moment in case of necessity. Villequier felt, too, that the clear, artful, and unscrupulous mind of the Abbé de Boisguerin was far better fitted to deal with, and frustrate him in any purpose that he might entertain, than that of the young marquis, which, though not deficient either in acuteness or policy, was constantly misled by inexperience, or by the impetuosity of strong passions. He felt that the counsels of the abbé might, under many circumstances,

if given sincerely, be a safeguard to Gaspar de Montsoreau against his arts; and he therefore saw no slight advantage in encouraging feelings of doubt and dissatisfaction in the mind of his young companion.

"It is surprising," said the marquis, "that the abbé did not communicate to me the facts which you have mentioned, Monsieur de Villequier; but I suppose that you bound him down to secrecy."

"To general secrecy," replied Villequier, "as was absolutely necessary. But you, of course, as my friend, and as the person most interested—you, of course, were excepted. No, Monsieur de Montsoreau, no! In this business the abbé has acted upon his own judgment. He was then at Blois, you know. I was in great haste, knew no other person to whom I could apply, and therefore intrusted him with the task, thinking him also, at that time, you must remember, sincerely, truly, and devotedly your friend."

"And have you any cause, Monsieur de Villequier," demanded the marquis, "have you any cause to suppose now that he is not my friend?"

"Nay, Monsieur de Montsoreau!" replied Villequier. "If you are satisfied, I have nothing to say. I only thought you seemed dissatisfied, and—"

"And what, Monsieur de Villequier?" demanded the marquis, seeing that he paused.

"I was going to say," replied Villequier, "that it might be as well for you to be upon your guard. We are living in troublous times, Monsieur de Montsoreau. We are both of us placed in a delicate situation; every word and action ought to be guided by policy and forethought; and though I do not wish to wound the delicacy of your friendship towards your relation and friend, Monsieur de Boisguerin, yet we all know that he is a skilful politician; and that when, some years ago, even as a young man, he appeared at the court of France, her majesty the queen-mother was heard to say, she was glad when he was gone, for she was confident that he would outwit Satan himself, and therefore might go far to outwit her."

"I should not mind his policy," replied the marquis. "I should not mind his policy, if you had not insinuated doubts as to whether he was at heart my friend."

Villequier answered nothing, but gazed down upon the ground with his brow somewhat contracted, and

then stirred the rushes on the floor with the point of his sword, as if determined not to make any reply.

"You are silent, Monsieur de Villequier," said Gaspar of Montsoreau; "and yet there is hanging a cloud of much thought upon your brow, as if there were intelligence in your breast which you could give, but would not. I beseech you, if you are really friendly to me—or, to speak more plainly—if our interests in this business are in some degree linked together, I beseech you to let me know fully and fairly what you think and what you know of the Abbé de Boisguerin."

"Thus adjured, Monsieur de Montsoreau," replied Villequier, "I can but answer you, that I do not think Monsieur de Boisguerin is as friendly to you as you suppose. Depend upon it, he has his own purposes to answer first, and you are but a secondary consideration, if not, perhaps, a tool."

"These are grave charges, sir," said Gaspar de Montsoreau, somewhat angry at the term tool. "I should like to have some proofs to sustain them."

"See! you are angry already," cried Villequier. "However, at the present moment I have no proofs to give. At some future time—ay, before the period of your marriage with Mademoiselle de Clairvaut, I may give you such proof of what is the abbé's real character and real feelings towards you, that you will say I am well justified. In the mean time, I have warned you sufficiently to put you on your guard. That is enough for the present moment: you must act as you think fit; but still you will be prepared. Farther, I have only to say, that it is not I that keep you from seeking Mademoiselle de Clairvaut. You have my full will and consent to see her when you will. I would not, indeed, have you visit her too often, lest discovery should ensue, and Guise obtain possession of her at once. But your own discretion must be your guide. I will now leave you, Monsieur de Montsoreau; and, depend upon it, you will not find that I will fail you in any of the promises I have made, and will very soon return to you with the business arranged by the king in the manner that you desire. We must then wait until farther delay be judged dangerous: then, if nothing occurs to relieve us from the other obstacles, we must, in the end, step over them; and, forgetting a little law, conclude your marriage, whether the Parliament awards me the guar-

dianship or not. When once she is made your wife, they cannot easily unwife her."

Gaspar de Montsoreau, full of thoughts rather than words, did not pursue the conversation farther. "I have but shown you scanty courtesy, Monsieur de Villequier," he said, "in not asking you to make your home of my poor house. It is not, indeed, such as I could wish to offer you, having been taken from its bankrupt lord in some slight haste. But still—"

"I thank you most humbly, marquis," replied Villequier. "But I am bound farther to the city on the hill there. I must lodge with Epernon to-night, for I have messages to him from the king."

Thus saying, after various more such ceremonious speeches as the age required, Villequier took his departure, and, mounting his horse, which he had ordered to be kept still saddled in the courtyard, he rode on towards Angoulême, followed by his train. As he did so, he once more thought over the alliance between Gaspar de Montsoreau and Marie de Clairvant. "If I can bring it about," he thought, "I not only gain this sum he promises, but bind him to me for ever. I am her nearest male relation, and I could not well find such an alliance in France. Montsoreau, Morly, Logères; it is a wonderful combination! But even, were it not for that, were it half as good, where should I get the man in France who would give a hundred thousand golden crowns for the possession of such a cold piece of pretty marble as that."

CHAPTER XIV.

WHILE the conversation just narrated was taking place, and the character and views of the Abbé de Boisguerin were being commented upon in a manner which he could but little have wished, he himself was pursuing his way towards the town of Angoulême, with feelings and purposes varying at every step; though in his case it was not the slightest sting of remorse or regret which occasioned this vacillation of purpose.

Probably there never was a man on earth who wholly

and entirely stilled the voice of conscience, and there might be moments when the abbé's own heart reproached him for things which he had done. But the habit of his thoughts was different. He had been brought up in a school where right and wrong were so frequently confounded for the purpose of maintaining the temporal dominion of the church, that, at a very early period of his life, he had arrived at that conclusion, which the skeptical followers of Pyrrho arrive at by a more lengthened process, namely, that on earth there is no absolute and invariable right and wrong.

The Jesuits had taught him, that what was wrong under some circumstances, and marked by the reprobation both of God and man, was right under other circumstances, and even praiseworthy; and forgetting the cautious restrictions under which the wiser and the better members of the order attempted, though vainly, to guard the doctrine, his keen and clear mind at once determined, that if fraud could ever be pious, virtue of any kind could be but a name. If there were no invariable and universal standard; if his thoughts and his actions were to be governed by the opinions, and directed to the purposes of men, the only rule of virtue, he saw, must be the approbation of others like himself; and as every course of action must have an end and object to secure energy in pursuing it, he readily fell into the belief that gratification was the great object, and men's good opinion but to be sought as a means to that end.

It may be easily conceived how far he went on upon such a course of reasoning. It naturally ended in the disbelief of everything that other men hold sacred: yet he put on all the semblances of religion; for, as he believed in no hereafter, to do so did not seem to him an impious mockery, but merely an unmeaning ceremony required by society. Everything had become with him a matter of calculation; anything that was to be obtained was to be obtained by a certain price, and, as he himself declared, he never regretted giving any price, provided the object was attained, and was of equal value.

It was his passions alone that led him wrong and made him calculate falsely. They had done so more than once in life, but yet not frequently; not indeed

that he sought to subdue them, but that they were not naturally easily roused.

It was not remorse then, or regret, that moved him in the varying state of his thoughts as he rode on. It was doubt as to the means that he was employing; it was doubt as to whether the strong passion, which he felt within his breast, was blinding his eyes and misleading his judgment as to the choice of paths and instruments. He felt that, on the present occasion, he calculated not so coolly as he was accustomed to do; he felt that the object he had proposed to himself—or, rather, which passion, and rash passion, had suggested—was one so great and so little likely to be obtained, that the means employed must be great and extraordinary also; and that no single false step could be taken without the loss of every hope. His sensations were all strangely complicated, however. He felt, and reproached himself for feeling, that the passion in his heart had grown up so powerful, so overwhelming, that, when he thought of staking life itself upon the issue, not a hesitation crossed his mind, and that he was ready to say, like a lovesick boy, "Let me die if she be not mine!" But with that passion he had mingled ambition, both as a means and as an end; prospects had opened before his eyes which had roused in his heart aspirations which he thought he had put down; and not only to succeed in his love, but to gild that love with pageantry, and state, and power, had now become his object.

Still, however, he remembered that, in grasping at these high things, he might overlook matters which would prevent him reaching them; and, after riding on quickly for some time, he drew in his rein, to think more calmly, to review his situation, and to calculate exactly all the important, the critical steps which were now to be taken.

"What am I next going to do?" he thought. "To seek for a priest who may work upon that impetuous, weak-minded boy, to yield the object of his passion, because, in the pursuit thereof, he has shed his brother's blood. And yet, is it likely that he will yield it? No! I fear not! and yet stronger minds than his have been bowed down by superstition to greater sacrifices. He may, it is true; and it may be as well to secure that chance: but then, even then, only one small step is

gained. If one could get him to yield all his great possessions at the same time, that were something! But he will not do that! Two centuries ago we would have sent him to the Holy Land: but those good times are past. What, then, is to be done? To hurry him on into some rash enterprise, and, sharing his danger, take the equal chance of which shall live and which shall die? That were a gamester's policy indeed. No! we must find more easy means than that."

"However," continued the abbé, after a pause, "in the mean time, I must strike for myself alone. She hates and abhors him evidently. I myself have been too rash and rough with her. My passion has been too impetuous, too fiery. I know that those women who seem so cold and circumspect are often like *Ætna*, icy above, but with fire at the heart. But I have been rash. She will easily forgive that offence, however, and forget it too, when I can woo her as one unbound by the clerical vows, and companion of the high and great. I must lose no time, however, for events are drawing clearly to a mighty issue. Here is the party of Henry and the party of the League. I must choose between the two without delay. And yet the choice is soon made. In the first place, it would be long ere Guise would trust me: in the next, he himself is not long lived. As I have seen a bird, when hit by a skilful fowler, tower high into the air before it falls, so Guise is soaring up with mighty effort, which will end but in his own destruction. I will away to Epernon at once. He is the man whose fortunes will yet rise; his unconquerable spirit, his courage, determination, and activity, his gross selfishness, his insolence, his very weakness, will all contribute to support him still. This is a world in which such things thrive! Epernon must be the man; and if I show him such cause as I can show him, he may well be glad to attach me to himself, as increasing his power and enhancing his importance with the king. It is to him I will go! Doubtless his reverses have humbled him somewhat, otherwise it were no light task to deal on such subjects with Epernon."

In judging of Epernon the abbé judged by mankind in general, for in almost every breast pride is a cowardly quality, and, once depressed, sinks into grovelling submission. Epernon, however, was the exception to the general rule, and seemed rather to rise in haughtiness under adversity.

With thoughts like those which we have just detailed, the abbé spurred on towards Angoulême; but, as he began to climb the steep ascent, he saw several indications of popular emotion, which made him hesitate for a moment as to whether he should proceed or not. There were two or three groups of citizens, all speaking eagerly together, and in low tones; and at the gates of the city he remarked a man whom he had seen before, and knew to be the mayor of the place, conversing in a low tone, but in what seemed an anxious manner, with the soldiers of the Corps de Garde. The abbé contrived to make his horse pass as near them as possible, but at the same time affected to be deeply busied with his own thoughts, while really listening attentively to their conversation. He could only catch, however, the end of one sentence and the beginning of a reply:

"This duke—a proud, insufferable tyrant," said the voice of the mayor.

"Get along; if you were not what you are, I would put my pike into you," replied the soldier; and went on with some observations upon his companion's conduct, not very complimentary, the whole of which the Abbé de Boisguerin did not hear.

As he advanced into the town, however, his keen eye remarked many more signs and symptoms of the same kind, from all of which he drew his own deductions; and on entering the castle, which was then inhabited by the Duke of Epéron, he dismounted in the court of the guardhouse, as it was called, where there were a considerable number of the duke's soldiery loitering about. Though it was not the usual place for visitors to dismount, they suffered him to attach his horse to one of the large iron hooks in the wall, and in a few minutes after he was in the presence of the Duke of Epéron. Not a trace of humiliation or abasement was to be seen in the duke's countenance or demeanour. He was as proud, as fierce, as fiery as ever; and although he received the abbé, having seen him more than once in Paris during the late events, and entertaining that degree of consideration for him which a keen and powerful mind almost always commands, he nevertheless seemed to doubt whether he should ask him even to sit down, and did it at length with an air of condescension.

"Well, Monsieur de Boisguerin," he said at length, "to what do I owe this visit?"

"I come, my lord," replied the abbé, without a moment's hesitation, "to offer your lordship my poor services."

The duke smiled. "They are, of course," he said, "welcome, Monsieur de Boisguerin. But the time of offering them is somewhat singular, when all men think my fortunes on the decline, or, perhaps, I should say, utterly down."

"Such it may seem to them, my lord," replied the abbé; "but such it seems not to me. There are sciences, my lord, which teach us what the future is destined to produce; and I own that I am quite selfish in my present act, seeking to attach myself to one who is yet destined to uphold the throne of France, to affect the fortunes of the times, to triumph over all his enemies, and to outlive most of them now living."

"Indeed!" said the duke, thoughtfully; "and am I to believe this prophecy seriously!"

"Most seriously, my lord," replied the abbé. "I myself believe it and know it, as I believe and know the great fortunes that are likely to attend myself; otherwise, perhaps, you might not have seen me here to-day."

"That is candid, at all events," said the duke; "and, to say truth, I think that your prophecy, in some things, may be right; for I feel within my breast that undiminished power, that sense of my own strength, that confidence in my own destiny, which surely never can be given to a falling man. But you spoke of your own future high fortunes, sir. What may they be?"

The abbé paused and looked down for a moment, but then replied, "I tell not the prophecy to every one, my lord; but to you, to whose services I hope to dedicate those high fortunes, I fear not to relate it. It was pronounced long ago, in the city of Rome, when I was there studying, and, as a rash young man, had entangled myself in an affair with a fair girl of the city, who suffered our intercourse to be discovered, and, consequently, wellnigh ruined all my prospects. I thought indeed it was so, and was turning my back upon Rome for ever, when I met with an old monk, who, from certain facts I told him, drew my horoscope, and assured me that I should find my fate in France; that my fortune would be brought about by the death of two relations far younger than myself; and that I should suddenly

take a share in great events, and rule the destiny of others when I least expected it. Such was the old man's prophecy now many years ago ; and I have seen no sign of its accomplishment till the present time."

"And what signs have you seen now?" demanded Epernon.

"That I have been suddenly led, my lord," replied the abbé, "from the calm and tranquil quiet of a provincial life, without my own will or agency, into scenes of activity and strife ; and that one out of the two lives which lay between me and the great possessions of Montsoreau, Logères, and Morly—lives which in their youth and healthfulness seemed to cut me off from all hope—has already lapsed, and left but one."

"How is that?" exclaimed the duke. "What life has lapsed?"

"That of the young Count of Logères," replied the abbé.

"Indeed!" exclaimed the Duke of Epernon, in a tone somewhat sorrowful. "I had not heard that. He was a bold, rash youth ; but yet there was in him the seeds of great things. He was fearless, and proud, and firm : virtues, the parents of all dignity and greatness. You say, then, that there is but one life between you and all these lordships."

"But one," replied the abbé ; "that of Gaspar of Montsoreau, in regard to whom you took some slight interest at the time his marriage with Mademoiselle de Clairvaut was talked of."

"Was talked of?" said the duke. "Is it not talked of still?"

"Why, my lord," replied the abbé, "the lady's evident detestation of the young marquis has rendered the matter hopeless. You yourself remarked it when you spoke with her at Vincennes ; and he is now convinced of it himself. The grief and depression thus produced have impaired his health ; and, indeed, it would seem as if ten years had gone over him, instead of a few months, since all this affair began."

"I hope, Monsieur de Boisguerin," said the Duke of Epernon, with a bitter smile, "I hope that you have not been taking too deep lessons of our friend Villequier. I would rather be a prisoner on a charge of high treason, and with Guise for my enemy, than I would be next akin to Villequier, and between him and lands and lordships."

The abbé's brow grew as dark as night. "My lord," he said, "I will not affect to misunderstand you; but I am sure that fate will work out its own will without any aid of mine; and, had I been disposed to clear the way for myself, who should have stopped me, or who could have discovered anything I did, when these two youths have been under my care and guardianship ever since their father's death?"

"I did but jest, abbé," replied the duke. "But, supposing that the events which you anticipate were really to occur, what would be your conduct then?"

"So sure am I, my lord," replied the abbé, "that they will occur, that my conduct has been put beyond doubt. I have already demanded of the court of Rome to be freed from this black dress; and my last letters from the eternal city announce to me that the dispensation is already granted, and, drawn up in full form, is now upon the road."

"Ha!" exclaimed the Duke of Epernon. "Is it so, indeed? You must have powerful protectors in the conclave."

"I have," replied the abbé; "and though his holiness is not fond of relaxing the vows of any one without some puissant motive, yet, when there is a strong one, he does not let the opportunity of unbinding slip, lest his key should grow rusty. But, however, my lord, supposing these things done away, and I Marquis of Montsoreau and Lord of Logères, my first aim and object would be to raise what power and forces I could, and with my sword, my wealth, and my life, were it necessary, serve his majesty the king, under him whom I hope soon to see directing the state, namely, the Duke of Epernon, if—"

"Ay, there is still an *if*," replied the duke. "Well, sir, what is the condition?"

"It is, my lord," said the abbé, after a pause, in which it was evident that he considered the way he was to put his demand, "it is, that the Duke of Epernon will pledge me his princely word, that, as far as his power and influence go, he will support my claim to the hand of Mademoiselle de Clairvaut."

The duke actually started back with surprise; and, forgetting altogether the splendid future with which the abbé had been endeavouring to invest his pretensions, he exclaimed, in a tone of anger and contempt that chafed

and galled the spirit of the ambitious man with whom he spoke, "Yours! yours, Abbé de Boisguerin? you, a poor preceptor in your cousin's house, an insignificant churchman, unbeneficed and unknown; you to lay claim to the heiress of Clairvaut, a niece of the Guise, a lady not far removed from a sovereign house! On my soul and honour, I mind me to write to Villequier at once, and bid him marry his cousin to this young marquis out of hand, in order to save your brains from being cracked altogether!"

"Villequier can marry his cousin to no one," answered the abbé, "without my full consent. No, nor can the king either!"

"Mort-bleu!" exclaimed Epernon, with a scornful laugh. "Vanity and ambition have driven the poor man mad. Get you gone, Monsieur de Boisguerin; get you gone! I shall not trust with any mighty faith to your fine prophecies."

Though the Abbé de Boisguerin felt no slight inclination to put his hand into his bosom, and, taking forth the dagger that lay calmly there, to plunge it up to the hilt in the heart of Epernon, he showed not in the slightest degree the wrath which internally moved him. Nay, the great object which he had in view made him in some degree conquer that wrath, and he replied, "Well, my good lord, I *will* get me gone. But, before I go, you shall hear another warning, which may enable you to judge whether my divinations are false or not. It is destined that, in the course of to-day or to-morrow, you should encounter a great peril. Remember my words! be upon your guard! and take measures to ensure yourself against danger! Go not out into the streets scantily attended—"

"Oh no!" replied the duke, with a sneer. "I do not trust myself alone in the streets and high roads without a footboy to hold my horse, like the noble aspirant to the hand of Mademoiselle de Clairvaut. I am not so bold a man, nor so loved of the people; and as to chance perils, I fear them not."

"Your acts on your own head, my lord duke!" replied his companion. "I give you good-day." And, turning away abruptly, he passed out of the room through the long corridor, and part of the way down the stairs which led to the court of the guard.

He was scarcely half way down, however, when some

sounds which he heard coming from the other side of the building made him suddenly stop, listen, and then turn round; and, with a step of light, he retraced his way to the chamber where he had left the duke.

Epernon was busy writing, and, looking up, fiercely demanded, "What now?"

"Fly, my lord, fly quick!" exclaimed the abbé. "I come to give you time to save yourself, for the mayor and his faction are upon you. They have come in by the great court, and I think have killed the Swiss at your gate. Believe me, my lord, for what I say is true. Fly quickly, while I run down to send the guard to your assistance."

His words received instant confirmation, even as the duke gazed doubtfully in his face; for a door on the opposite side of the room burst open, and a terrified attendant rushed in, while eight or nine fierce faces were seen pursuing him quickly.

The duke darted to a staircase which led to a little turret, and the first steps of which entered the room, without any door, just behind his chair. He sprang up eagerly towards the small dressing-room above, and the mayor and his armed companions pursued as fiercely, leaving the abbé to make his escape towards the court of the guard, without giving any heed to his proceedings. Before the abbé had passed the door, however, he heard a loud crash, and turned his head to see by what it was occasioned, when, at a single glance, he perceived that the very eagerness of his pursuers had saved the Duke of Epernon. Ten or twelve heavily-armed men had all rushed at once upon the old and crazy staircase which led to the duke's dressing-room. The woodwork had given way beneath them, precipitating one or two into the story below, and the greater part back into the room itself, but leaving a chasm between them and the duke which it was impossible for them to pass.*

Without pausing to make any farther remark, the abbé ran down hastily and alarmed the guard; and while the soldiers rushed tumultuously up to defend a commander whom they all enthusiastically loved, the Abbé

* Such is the account given by the most credible historians. The author of the life of the duke, M. Girard, who was nearly contemporary, gives a different version: acknowledges that the duke fled into his cabinet, but adds that he there defended himself like a lion.

de Boisguerin mounted his horse and rode quietly out of the town. He doubted not, as indeed it happened, that the soldiery would arrive in time to save their lord, and to compel the mayor and his comrades to make a hasty retreat.

It was not, however, towards the Chateau of Islay, where he had left Gaspar de Montsoreau, that the solitary horseman took his way ; but, on the contrary, crossing the Charente, he rode rapidly onward by the banks of the river, in the direction of that field of Jarnac where, in his early days, Henry III. had given such striking promises of heroism and conduct which his after life so signally failed to fulfil.

As he rode along, he thought, with somewhat of a smile upon his countenance, that his last prophecy to the Duke of Epemon had met with a speedy fulfilment ; and he pondered with some bitterness over the parting words which that nobleman had spoken to him.

"The aspirant to the hand of Mademoiselle de Clairvaut," he said to himself, "without a single footboy to hold his horse ! That may be in the present instance policy rather than anything else, my good lord duke. But still we may learn wisdom, even, from such bitter words as those. I had forgotten how much all men value the gilded exterior. But it shall be so no longer. This that I aim at must be soon lost or won. I have staked life upon the pursuit, and all that makes life valuable. And why should I not stake fortune also ? 'Fortune buys fortune,' says the old adage ; and, as the stake is great, so shall my game be bold."

His resolution was instantly taken. He possessed, as we have said before, sufficient wealth to give him competence, and to enable him to mingle with decent splendour in the society in which he was born. But he calculated that the same fortune which put him at ease for life, might afford him the means of magnificence and display, if he resolved to expend the whole within a few years. He did so resolve, saying to himself, "I shall either be at the height of fortune and enjoyment ere two years be over, or I shall be no more. It suits me not to go on playing stake after stake, as many men do, beaten, like a tennis-ball, from prosperity to ruin, and from ruin to prosperity. I have bent myself to one great purpose, and I will attain it or die.

That is always within one's power, to shake off life when it is no longer a source of happiness."

As he thus thought, his horse slowly descended a gentle hill by the side of the river, with a meadow down to the Charente on the one side, and a bank crowned with the wall of a vineyard on the other. Built up against the wall was a little shrine, with a virgin and child behind a network of iron, and the votive offering of a silver lamp burning below.

Sitting on the little green spot which topped the bank at that place, after having apparently said his prayers at the foot of the shrine, was a boy of about thirteen or fourteen years of age; and as the abbé came slowly near, the youth took a pipe out of his pocket and began playing a wild, plaintive Italian air, full of rich melody and deep feeling. The music was not new to the abbé; he had heard it before in other lands, when the few pure feelings of the heart which he had ever possessed had not been crushed, like accidental flowers blossoming on a footpath, by the passing to and fro of other coarser things.

He drew in his horse and paused to listen, and then gazed at the boy, and thought he had seen him somewhere before. The eyes, the features, the expression of the countenance, seemed to be all connected with some old remembrances; and the air which he played, too, brought his memory suddenly back to early scenes, and a land that he had loved. As he gazed at the boy, who went on with the air, the recollection of his person again connected itself with different events; and, though now he was clothed in simple gray, he fancied he recognised in him the youth who had been seen with Charles of Montsoreau when he attacked and defeated the small body of reiters near La Ferté, and whom he had also beheld more than once in Paris, when he was watching the proceedings of the young count in the capital.

This conviction became so strong, that he went up and spoke to him, and found that it was as he suspected. After conversing with him for a few moments, he told him that, if he would pursue that road for nearly a league, he would meet with some buildings belonging to a farm; and then, turning again down a road to the left, he would find him at a chateau upon the banks of the river. The boy promised to come, and the abbé

rode on, while Ignati, putting up his pipe, followed as fast as possible, and soon arrived at the gates of the dwelling to which he had been directed.

He was brought into the presence of the abbé by an attendant wearing the colours of no noble house in France, and found him with some fruit and wine before him. But in regard to the subject on which the boy expected to be questioned most closely, namely, the death of Charles of Montsoreau, the abbé spoke not one word. Notwithstanding all his firmness of purpose, notwithstanding the remorseless character of his mind and of his habitual thoughts, he loved not to touch upon the subject of his young cousin's death, unless forced on to do so by circumstances. He spoke of Paris and of the Duke of Guise, and where he had first met with the young Count of Logères, and of all the accidents that had befallen him while in company with Charles of Montsoreau. But he spoke not one word in regard to the day of the barricades or the young nobleman's death.

From time to time, while he talked with the boy, Ignati saw that the abbé's eyes fixed upon his countenance, and at length he asked him, "You are an Italian by birth, are you not?"

"I am," replied the boy; "that is, I am a Roman." And he said it with that pride which every person born within the precincts of the ancient queen of empires, although glory has long departed from her walls, and the memory of past greatness is rather a reproach than an honour.

"And what is your name?" demanded the abbé, sharply.

"My name is Ignati," answered the youth.

"Ignati!" said the abbé, "Ignati! But you have some other name. What was your father's?"

"I do not know," answered the boy, with his cheeks and his brow glowing. "Why do you ask?"

"Your mother's, then?" said the abbé, without replying to his question. "Your mother's! what was your mother's name?"

"Her name was Laura Pandolfini," replied the boy, gazing upon the abbé with a degree of sternness in his look. "Did you know her?"

The face of the abbé changed from deadly pale to glowing red in a moment; and, after a pause, he replied

angrily and abruptly, "I know her! I know her! I know a common strumpet!"

The boy's eyes flashed fire, and his hand was in his bosom in a moment, seeking the knife that lay there. But he had put the pipe in the breast of his doublet also, and, ere he could reach a weapon which, as we have seen, he was able to use with fatal effect, the form of a lady passing across the two open doors on the other side of the room made him suddenly pause; and, after a moment's thought, he drew back his hand and said, "What you say is false! She deserved not the name you have given her!"

He was turning towards the door, when the abbé cried "Stay!" and, as the boy turned, he put his hand to his head and mused thoughtfully. Then starting suddenly, he added, "No, no! It would be discovered! Come hither, boy!" he added; and, taking out his purse, he counted out some pieces of gold to no light amount; and, giving them to the boy, he said, "There, you have lost your master, and seem to be poorly off. Take those, and get thee into some reputable employment."

But the boy gave one fierce glance at his countenance, dashed down the gold upon the pavement, and exclaiming, "I will have no liar's money!" quitted the chamber and the house.

The abbé gazed after him for a moment or two, fell into deep thought, and ended by pressing his hands over his eyes and exclaiming, "I am a fool!"

After pausing for a few moments more, he said to himself, "Well, I must wait no longer here. This girl seems pleased with my new demeanour towards her. Of my past language, which frightened her, it seems that very soon no other impression will remain but the memory of the deep and passionate love I testified. That is never displeasing to any woman; and, if I can lead her gently on, the matter will soon be accomplished, now that this, her first fancy, is at an end, and the grave has taken the great obstacle out of the way. Love him she did not, with true, womanly, passionate love; but fond of him she was, with the sickly fancy of an idle girl; and her grief will be sufficient to soften her proud heart. It is a wonderful softener, grief; and she will cling to whosoever is near her, that has skill and power to sooth and support her. I will teach her to love better than she has loved! But I must write down these tidings.

I must not tell them to her with my own voice, and with her eyes upon me, lest she learn to hate me as the bearer of evil tidings."

And, seeking for pen and ink, he wrote a note, such as few others but himself could have composed. It was tender, yet respectful; not lover-like, yet through every word of it love's light was shining; sad, but not gloomy; melancholy, yet with words of hope. When he had done he folded and sealed it, and then, listening to the distant village clock, he said,

"If I am absent much longer, Gaspar may suspect; and I am rather inclined to believe that some one has roused suspicions in his mind already. Well, we shall soon see; it is no very difficult task to rule a light-brained youth like that."

Thus thinking, and leaving the note behind him on the table, the abbé proceeded to the stables, chose a fresh horse, caused it to be saddled and bridled, and rode back to the Chateau of Islay with all speed. Before he proceeded to the saloon to join the young marquis, he questioned his own servants as to all that had taken place during his absence, heard of the long visit of Villequier, and planned his own conduct accordingly.

Gaspar of Montsoreau, when he joined him, expressed some surprise that he had not returned before, and added, in as gentle a tone as he could assume, "I trust, my good friend, that you have been pursuing the inquiries which have so long frustrated us in regard to the dwelling of that sweet girl, whom we were very wrong to place again in the hands of Villequier, even though it might have cost us our lives had we either remained in Paris, or attempted to take her with us."

Though the young marquis spoke quickly, his companion, who knew his character to the very bottom, and could instantly see the workings of his mind when he used any of the arts he himself had taught him, perceived at once that Villequier had betrayed the secret of Marie de Clairvaut's abode; and he replied deliberately, "Yes, Gaspar, I have been more successful; and I think now—tamed down as you have been by grief, and requiring some consolation—I think now, I say, that it is not only safe, but right, to let you know both that this fair girl is in the neighbourhood of the spot where we now stand, and that she is under my care and guidance."

"In the neighbourhood!" exclaimed Gaspar of Montsoreau. "Under your care and guidance! How happened I not to hear this before, abbé?"

"Simply," replied the abbé, "because the state of violence and irritation in which you were when I last returned to you from Blois—the period when I first became possessed of any knowledge on the subject—would have led you into acts of impetuosity which, in the first place, would have terribly injured your cause with her; and, in the next, would have discovered the place of her abode to every one from whom we seek to conceal it. Now, however, I think you can command yourself, and you will find the benefit of what has been done to serve you. All I require is, that you would let me know when you visit Mademoiselle de Clairvaut; that you would do so with prudence, and caution, and forbearance; and though it is not, of course, necessary that you should desist from pleading your own cause with her, yet let it be as gently as may be."

The Abbé de Boisguerin knew that Gaspar de Montsoreau could not do as he asked him; that it was not in his nature to plead his own cause gently. He felt perfectly confident that the rash impetuosity of the young marquis would alienate more and more the regard of Marie de Clairvaut, and thus, perhaps, facilitate even his own views and purposes. Could he have prevented it, he would not willingly have let him visit her at all; but it was now impossible to exclude him; and he knew that the secret of Charles of Montsoreau's death gave him the power of destroying at once all his former pupil's hopes, if he saw that he even made one step in removing the bad impressions Marie previously had received.

On his part, though not quite satisfied with being deceived, Gaspar of Montsoreau believed that the abbé had deceived him for his own good; and the selfish purposes which were most needful for him to discover, were still concealed in spite of the warnings of Villequier.

CHAPTER XV.

IN the gardens of the chateau by the banks of the Charente, which the Abbé de Boisguerin had left to return to Gaspar de Montsoreau, and in an arbour which had been constructed, as is still ordinary with the people of that country, by a number of vines entwined over a light trellis work, with a soft and beautiful scene before her eyes, and the autumn sunshine gilding the glowing waters, Marie de Clairvaut sat and wept, with the note from the abbé which had conveyed to her the bitterest tidings she ever had received on earth open in her hand. A day had passed since the events just recorded had taken place, and she had now received the news many hours, but her grief had not in the least subsided; and to herself it even seemed greater than it had been at first. Her whole thoughts at first had been bent upon the one painful fact, that he whom she had loved with all the fervour, and the depth, and the devotion of a heart that had never loved before, was lost to her for ever; that she should never behold again that frank and candid countenance, beaming with looks of deep and indubitable affection; that she should never again see those eyes poring into hers with the intense gaze of love, and seeming at once to give and receive fresh light; that she should never hear the tones of that musical voice, which had so often assured her of protection and support; that she should never cling to that arm, which had so often brought her rescue and deliverance in the moment of danger. Then she had felt only that he was lost and gone; cut off in the brightness of his days, in the glory and strength of his youth, in the full blossom of his hopes, and ere he had yet more than lifted to his lips the cup which, offered to him by honour, virtue, and sincerity, ought to have been a sweet one indeed.

Now, however, there had grown upon her mind feelings indeed more selfish, but which were the natural consequences of her situation, and connected intimately with the loss of him she loved. A feeling of desolation had come over her; of utter loneliness in all the

world. It seemed as if she had never loved, or esteemed, or clung to any but himself; as if there were no one to protect her, to guide, support, direct, or cheer her upon earth; as if life's youth were over, the fortune of existence spent like a prodigal, the heart's treasury empty, and nothing left for the immortal spirit on this side the grave but penury of every rich and noble feeling, lone solitude and petty cares, and all the dull anxieties of a being without an object.

Desolate, desolate indeed did she feel: and well too might she feel desolate! for though her grief did some wrong to many who loved her as friends and relations, and would have done much to aid and support her, yet, oh! what is such love and esteem! what is aid and support wrung from the midst of hours devoted to other things, and thoughts and feelings centred upon other objects, when compared with the entire devotion, the pure, the single love of an upright, an honourable, and a feeling heart; where the being loved is the great end and object of every thought and every action; where all the feelings of the spirit are hovering by day round that one object, and guarding it like angels through the watches of the night? Oh yes, she was lonely, she was desolate, she was unprotected and unsupported, when she compared the present with the past! Well might she think so; well might she grieve and mourn over her own deprivation, when she wept for him and for his early end!

Some comfort, perhaps, had been indeed afforded her by the change which had taken place in the demeanour of the Abbé de Boisguerin. She could never love him; she could never like him: his society could never even become tolerable to her: but yet it was no slight satisfaction to find that she was no more to hear words which she considered as little less than sacrilegious, or to endure the eager passion in his eye, and hear him dare to talk to her of love. She looked upon him as her jailer indeed, though he often denied that he had power to liberate her; but yet she felt that peace and comfort at least depended much upon that jailer's will, and was not a little pleased to find that, during the three or four last visits which he had paid, no word which could offend her had been spoken, no tone or even look that she could take amiss was to be seen, though a certain tenderness and melancholy seemed to have fallen upon him,

which she could well have wished removed or not so openly displayed.

During the very morning of which we are now speaking, he had come there again, and his conduct towards her had been all that she could have desired. He had not spoken directly of the cause of the deep grief which he saw his intelligence of the former day had brought upon her, but all his words were chosen so as to harmonize with that grief; and the object of his visit itself, as he expressed it, was only to see whether he could do anything to console her, or to alleviate the sorrow under which she laboured. She had thanked him for his courtesy and kindness; but, ere he had left her, he said with a tone of what seemed real regret, that he was sorry to say his own visit would be followed by another, which he feared might, in some degree, importune her.

"The young Marquis of Montsoreau," he added, "will be restrained no longer from seeing you; and you know, madam, it is impossible for me to prevent him, which I would willingly have done, especially as the view he takes of the recent most lamentable event is not likely to do aught but give you pain."

"Oh, cannot you stay him?" exclaimed Marie de Clairvaut. "Cannot you stay him at this terrible moment, when the very sight of him will be horrible to me?"

"I fear not indeed, lady," replied the abbé. "I would have given my right hand to prevent his coming, but he seemed perfectly determined. However, when I return, I will do my best once more, in the hope that he may yet be moved." And, after a visit very much shorter than usual, he had taken his leave and departed.

The fair girl he left had gone out into the gardens, as we have seen, once more to weep alone over the sad and painful situation in which she was placed, and over the dark and irreparable loss which she had sustained; but, ere she had gone out, she had taken the only precaution in her power to ensure that her solitude would remain inviolate, directing the servants—who acted, indeed, the part of turnkeys—if the Marquis of Montsoreau applied to see her, to state at once that she was not well enough to receive him, and wished to pass some days alone and in tranquillity.

She wept long and bitterly; but in about an hour after she had gone out, the sound of horses' feet reached her ear, and voices speaking at the gateway made them-

she heard. She could distinguish even the tones of the young marquis, and indistinctly the words of the servant in reply. But Gaspar of Montsoreau was hurt and offended by the message she had left, and a certain inclination to tyranny in his disposition broke forth with his usual impetuosity.

"Inform Mademoiselle de Clairvaut," he said, "who it is that desires to see her, and let me have an answer quick. Say that I much wish for a few minutes' conversation with her. What, fellow! Would you shut the gates upon me like a horseboy! Get ye gone, and return quickly. I will walk in the gardens till you come back." And, striding in, he threw the gate violently to, and advanced directly to the water's side, as if he could have divined that the object of his search was there.

Marie de Clairvaut was indignant, and that feeling for a moment enabled her to throw off the overwhelming load of grief. Rising at once, she came forth, and crossed the green slope towards the chateau, passing directly by Gaspar of Montsoreau as she did so, and intending merely to bow her head by way of salutation. He placed himself in such a manner, however, that she could not pass on, although he must have seen the tears fresh upon her cheeks, and her indignation was more roused than before.

"I directed the servant, sir," she said, when forced to pause, "to inform you, if you came, that I was not well enough to see you, and that I wished for solitude and tranquillity."

"Nay, indeed, dear lady," said the young marquis, conquering the feelings of anger with which he had entered, and speaking with a calm and tender tone, "I thought, if you knew that I was here, pity, if nothing else, would induce you to see, but for a few moments, one who has languished for weeks and months for a single glance of your eyes; one who so deeply, so tenderly, so devotedly loves you."

Those words sounded harsh, painful, and insulting to the ears of Marie de Clairvaut; words which, from the lips of him she loved, would have been all joy and sweetness, but were now abhorrent to her ear; and, looking at him sternly, with her bright eye no longer dimmed, though her lip quivered, she said, "Never let me hear such words again, sir! I beg that you would let me pass! Marquis of Montsoreau, this is cruel and

ungentlemanly ! Learn that I look upon myself as your brother's widow, and ever shall so look upon myself till my dying day." And, thus saying, she passed him and entered the house.

She listened eagerly for the sound of horses' feet after she had entered her own apartments, and was very soon satisfied that the young marquis had gone back. As soon as she was assured of this, she once more went out into the open grounds, for the load of grief ever makes the air of human dwellings feel oppressive; and again going down to the bank of the river, she gazed upon its tranquil current as she walked by the side; and, though her sorrow certainly found no relief, yet the sight of the waters flowing beneath her eyes, calm, tranquil, incessant, led, as it were, her thoughts along with them. They became less agitated, though still as deep and powerful; they seemed to imitate the course of the river, running on incessantly in the same dark stream, but in quiet and in silence. The tears indeed would, from time to time, rise into her eyes and roll over her cheeks, but no sob accompanied them; and though a sigh often broke from her lip, it was the sigh of deep, calm despair, not of struggling pain.

It is wonderful how, when we are in deep grief, the ordinary sounds and sights of joyous nature strike harsh and inharmonious upon us. Things that would pass by unheard at other times, as among the smaller tones in the great general concert of the day, then become painfully acute. The lark that sung up in the sky above her head made no pleasant melody for her ear; a country boy crossing the opposite fields, and whistling as he went, pained her so much, and made her gentle heart feel so harsh towards him, that she schooled herself for such sensations, saying, "He cannot tell that I am so sorrowful! He cannot tell that the sounds which I once was fond of are now the most distasteful to me."

A minute or two after a few notes upon a pipe were played immediately beneath the garden wall; a little sort of prelude, to see that the instrument was clear; and, unable to endure it any longer, Marie de Clairvaux turned to seek shelter in her prison.

Ere she had taken three steps, however, she paused. The air was not one of the country; a finer hand, too, a more exquisite taste than France could produce, woke the instrument into sounds most musical; and, in a mo-

ment after, she recognised the sweet air which she had twice before heard, and both times from the lips of Charles of Montsoreau.

The memory of the first time that it had met her ear was sweet and delightful ; but the memory of the second time was as the memory of hope ; and, in despite of all, it woke again the feelings it had awakened before ; and an indistinct feeling of glad expectation came across her mind like a golden sunbeam, shining through the mist of an autumnal morning. What was it she hoped ? what was it she expected ? She knew not herself ; but still there was an indistinct brightening came over her heart and feelings ; and when the air was over, instead of flying from the music, she listened eagerly for its renewal.

The pipe, however, sounded not again ; but in a moment after she heard some one say, "Hark !" and the sweetest possible voice began to sing :

*
SONG.

Weep not, lady, weep not,
Grief shall pass away ;
Angels' eyes that sleep not
Watch thee on thy way.

Heavenly hands are twining
Garlands of glad flowers.
Joy and Hope combining,
Wreath thy future hours.

Diff'rent powers are near thee,
Bright Hope, dark Despair ;
Let the goddess cheer thee,
Fly the fiend of Care.

Son of Sin and Sorrow,
Despair by earth was given ;
Child of the bright to-morrow,
Hope was born of Heaven.

What could it mean ? Marie de Clairvaut asked herself. The words seemed directly addressed to her, and applicable to her own situation ; yet the voice, as far as she could judge, she had never heard before. But still every note, every word, appeared to counsel hope. "Can I have been deceived ?" she thought. "Can the Abbé de Boisguerin and Gaspar de Montsoreau have combined, for their own dark purposes, to cheat me,

to induce me to believe that the one I love so well is dead!"

But alas, no! The abbé had left, enclosed in his own, the brief note which he had received from Paris, announcing the event, and that note bore every appearance of being an ordinary matter of business, passing regularly through the postoffice of the capital. Could the song that she had heard, she asked herself again, could it have been accidental; could it have been sung at that moment through one of those strange combinations, which sometimes arise out of entirely indifferent circumstances, to give zest to our joy or poignancy to our sorrow? She determined, if possible, to ascertain; and, raising her voice a little above its ordinary tone, she said, "Who is there? To whom do you sing?"

She did not seem to have made herself heard, however, for a moment after the same voice demanded, "Is there any one that listens?"

"Yes, yes!" she exclaimed, eagerly, "I listen; speak on!"

"Well then, hearken," said the voice, and again a new air and a new song began.

SONG.

He goes away to a far-distant land,
With cross on his shoulder and lance in his hand;
And news soon comes how his lightning brand
Has scattered the hosts of panimrie.

His beautiful lady sits weeping and lone,
And wishes she were where her knight has gone;
But she grieves not his absence with angry moan,
For her spirit is full of his chivalry.

But what are the tidings come next to her ear?
Oh! tidings dark and heavy to hear;
How her fearless warrior, her husband dear,
Has fallen 'neath the lance of the Moalema.
How, gallantly staking his life, to save
From infidel hands the Redeemer's grave,
He has fought for the righteous and sleeps with the brave,
'Neath the walls of Hierosolima!

'Tis true, oh, 'tis true! yet she will not believe,
"Ah, no! e'en in dying he would not deceive;
And he promised, if spirit such power could receive,
And he fell in his holy chivalry,
To visit my side in the watches of night,
To comfort my heart and to gladden my sight,
And call me to join him in countries of light,
And dwell in his breast through eternity."

Years pass, and he comes not. Nor yet she believes !
'Tis his absence, but 'tis not his death, that she grieves.
Hope strong in affection, her heart still deceives,
Lo ! she watches yon Palmer how eagerly,
To ask him some tidings of Syria to say ;
But what is thy magic, oh, thou Palmer gray ?
She is clasped in his arms ! she has fainted away !
And he kisses her fair cheek how tenderly.

As the song had gone on, Marie de Clairvaut could no longer doubt that, though allegorical, those words were applicable to herself. Joy, joy beyond all conception took the place of grief ; all that she had suffered, all that she had endured in the past, she now felt, indeed, to be nothing to what she had lately undergone. But the ecstatic delight which the last words of that song gave, the sudden dissipation of grief was too much for her to endure. It was like the light that blinds us when we suddenly rush from the darkness into the sunshine ; and she who had gone through dangers, and horrors, and perils of many a kind, firm and unshaken, fell fainting under the sudden effect of joy. How long she remained so she knew not ; but, at all events, it was not long enough to attract the attention of the people of the house, from the windows of which she was screened by a thick alley of trees. Some one, however, had been near her, for there were the prints of small feet in the grass, extending from the wall to the spot where she lay, and immediately under her hand was placed a small packet addressed to herself.

Fearful of discovery, she hid it instantly in her bosom, and, as soon as she could, rose, and with a step far slower than her wishes, sped back again to the house, to read the paper she had received in secret.

It was written in a bold, free hand ; the date was that very morning ; and the first words, " My beloved."

Marie de Clairvaut laid the letter down and gasped for breath. It was sufficient, it was altogether sufficient ; every doubt, every fear that had remained was now at an end, and she once more burst into tears ; but oh, how sweet were those tears ! how happy ! how unlike the past ! Soon she took up the letter again, and, through the dazzling drops that still hung in her eyes, read the bright assurance that he lived for her who loved him.

" I have feared," the letter said, " I have feared that a report of my death which has been current in this city of Paris should have reached my beloved Marie, and the

more especially as, by the counsel and earnest entreaty of the Duke of Guise, I have myself contributed to the spread of the rumour, and have taken every means to suffer it to be confirmed. The object of this, however, was to deliver you alone by throwing those who so unjustly detain you off their guard; and some days ago I came on into this neighbourhood—where my brother, the Abbé de Boisguerin, and the Duke of Epernon all are, and to which we have traced Villequier several times—in the confident belief that you were not far distant from Angoulême. It might have been some time ere I discovered your abode; but accident has befriended me, and my page, who bears you this, and undertakes positively to deliver it to you, saw you yesterday morning by a most extraordinary but fortunate chance. I dare not venture near you in the early part of the morning, but, ere night has closed in, I will find some means to see and speak with you. As far as possible, dearest Marie, be prepared for anything that it may be necessary to undertake. I fear that you have already suffered much; but I will not doubt that even the rash and violent men who have dared every crime to withdraw you from those that love you best, have treated you with tenderness and kindness. I too have suffered much, but far more from knowing that you were at the mercy of those who persecute you while I was lying stretched upon the bed of sickness, than from the very wounds that brought me there. I am now well: I am near you; and that is enough to enable me to say that I am happy, although there may be perils and dangers before us, as we are still in the midst of our adversaries, and must once more attempt to pass through a long tract of countrv with obstacles at every step."

The letter ended with every expression of affection and of love; and again and again Marie de Clairvaux read it and wept, and fell into fits of deep thought, and could scarcely believe that the joyous tidings were true.

She next asked herself what she could do to favour her lover's efforts. The two or three women who had been appointed to wait upon her, as well as the male attendants by whom she was surrounded, were all strangers to her, and she felt that they were her jailers. There was one of them, however, who had looked upon her during the preceding day with evident compassion; had watched her tears with sorrowful eyes; and had

spoken a few words of consolation. At one time she thought of speaking to that woman, and trying to gain her to her interests for the purpose of facilitating anything that Charles of Montsoreau might do to effect her liberation. She hesitated, however; and judging that, if he succeeded in seeing her that evening, it would be by passing over the wall at the spot where she had heard the boy singing in the evening, she lingered about during the whole of the evening, listening for the least sound. None was heard, however, and at length the bell at the gates of the enclosure was heard to ring.

Agitated and anxious, fearing that every moment might bring Charles of Montsoreau to the spot, at the very time that other persons were near, she came out from behind the trees and walked slowly on by the side of the river. Just at that moment a small boat, pushed slowly up the current by a country boy, passed by the spot where she stood; but the boy whistled lightly on his way as he went, and took no notice of her; and, in a minute after, she heard steps approaching from the other side, and turned with some anxiety to see who it was that approached.

It was the servant-girl we have before mentioned, who came towards her quickly, saying, "You have been very sad these two days, lady, and I wish you would take comfort. Here is a good man, one of the preaching friars, just called at the gate, and I'm sure, if you would but listen to him, he would give you consolation."

"Oh no," replied Marie de Clairvaut, "he could give me no consolation, my good girl. My own thoughts just now are my best companions."

As she spoke, however, to her dismay, she saw the monk coming across the green from the side of the gates, and she determined at once to reject all his proffered advice and consolation, fearing that the precious minute for seeing him she loved might be lost by this unwonted intrusion.

"Do listen to him, dear lady," said the girl. "When I told him how sad you were, he said he was sure that he could give you comfort."

In the mean time, the friar approached with a slow step, with his cowl drawn over his head, and his hand supported by his staff. Marie de Clairvaut trembled from anxiety and apprehension, and only returned the friar's benediction by an inclination of the head and an

assurance that she did not stand in need of the consolation he offered.

"Yet listen to me, daughter," he said, without withdrawing the cowl from his head. But the first tones of that full rich voice proved sufficient nearly to overpower the fair girl to whom he spoke. "If you will hear me but for five minutes, my daughter," he said, "I think and I believe that I can suggest to you consolations that you may take to heart; and if not, the few words I have to speak can do you no harm at least."

Marie de Clairvaut bowed her head, and took a step or two nearer to the water, while the woman withdrew for a short space, so as to be out of earshot. But still she remained watching the two, as if she were either afraid of having done wrong in admitting the friar at all, or had suddenly conceived some suspicion of his purpose. The eyes of Marie de Clairvaut and of Charles of Montsoreau turned that way, and both saw that they were watched. Could they have followed the dictates of their own hearts, they would have cast themselves into each other's arms; but now they were forced to stand, ruling every look and every gesture, and assuming the demeanour of strangers, even while the words of love and affection were bursting from their lips. The young nobleman, however, gave but brief course to his feelings.

"This night, Marie," he said, after a few words of passionate tenderness, "this very night, at twelve, a boat shall be ready for you underneath that bank, and means prepared for you to descend. It has already passed up the river in order that we may descend swiftly with the stream, for the current is too rapid to permit of our passing up without the risk of being stopped at every moment. At Jarnac, however, all is prepared for our escape; and though our journey thence may be longer, it will be more secure. Can you be here at that hour?"

"I can," she said, "and will; and, oh! may God grant, Charles, that this time we may not only come within sight of the haven, as we have twice done before, but reach it altogether; and never, never again will I suffer them to separate me from you, as I did on that awful day in Paris."

"Even yet, neither I nor the duke know how it happened," said Charles of Montsoreau.

"As I was following the queen," replied Marie, rapidly, "some one pulled me by the sleeve, and, on turning to see who it was, the crowd closed in between me and Catharine. The person who had touched me was dressed in the colours of the house of Guise, and he said, 'The duke expects you, mademoiselle. If you will come round this way, I will lead you to the other gate, where there is no crowd.' I followed willingly, and nothing doubting; and he led me round into one of the streets behind, when suddenly I was seized by the arms on either side, and hurried along without the power of resistance. I cried for help as loud as I could, indeed, but they bore me rapidly into the house opposite, where I saw the Abbé de Boisguerin, and could hear your brother's voice talking to Monsieur de Villequier. They then put me into a chair, the blinds of which I could not undraw, and carried me rapidly to another house, where I remained for some time, till Villequier and the rest again appeared. I did all that woman could do, Charles, to make them set me free; but what could I do! what means had I to use! entreaties to which they were deaf; menaces at which they laughed. Your brother, indeed, said something that he intended for kindness, and the abbé looked gloomy and sad. But Villequier only smiled for all answer; till at length tidings were brought them that they were discovered; and that people were coming rapidly in pursuit of them. I was then once more borne away by Villequier, after a few words between him and your brother; and I heard your brother say as they parted, 'I will delay them as long as possible.' Where they took me I know not well, but I believe it was the Hôtel de Villequier. But see, the woman is coming near! We must part, dear Charles; I fear we must once more part."

Nothing more could be said, for the girl now approached; and Charles of Montsoreau, assuming the tone of the friar, bade Marie remember his words, and take them to heart; and then, giving her his blessing, departed.

Shortly before midnight, wrapped in a cloak of a dark colour, in order, as far as possible, to pass unobserved if any eye should be watching, Marie de Clairvaut passed through one of the lower windows of the chateau, and with a light step sprang into the little cloister that ran along one side of the building, at no great depth from the window. The moon was shining bright and full, and

every object around, except where the shadow of the cloister fell, was as clear as if the sun had been in the sky.

She paused and listened with a beating heart. There was no sound but the murmur of the quick Charente ; and then, putting her ear to the open window, she listened there to ascertain that all was quiet in the house. Nothing stirred ; and knowing how important it was to leave no trace of the manner in which her flight had been effected, she closed the casement carefully, and prepared to go forth into the moonlight.

There was something, however, in the stillness, and the clearness, and the calmness of everything that was in itself fearful ; and she hesitated for a moment before she went out. At length, however, she ventured across the green and shining turf, and with a quick step approached the edge of the water. Looking down upon it from above, she could see nothing in the deep shadow of the bank ; but, suddenly, a bright ripple caught some stray rays of moonlight, and checkered the dark bosom of the water with quick lines of silver.

"Are you there?" said the voice of Charles of Montsoreau from below.

"Yes," she said. "How shall I descend?"

But, even as she spoke, a figure glided out from the shrubs beside her, and, uttering a low cry, Marie de Clairvaut perceived the girl who had given admittance to the supposed friar on the preceding evening. The sound which she had uttered had instantly caught the attention of Charles of Montsoreau ; and, springing up the bank, he found the girl with her hand clasped round the lady's wrist, but holding up the other hand as if enjoining silence.

"You are unkind," said the girl, in a low tone, "when I was kind to you. I have already been bitterly reproached for letting in the monk ; and now, if you fly, what will become of me ? They will say that I did it."

"Fear not ! fear not !" answered Charles of Montsoreau, "and attempt not to detain the lady, my good girl ; for so she must and will ; and, as there is no other boat here, any attempt to pursue us will be vain. All you can do by endeavouring to detain her will be useless, and but injure yourself. Here is money for you," he continued.

The girl put it away with her hand, replying, "I want

no money, sir; but if she goes I will go with her. I will not stay here in the power of that dark abbé. I will come with her if she will let me."

"Willingly, willingly," replied Charles of Montsoreau; "but say not a word, and come quick; and remember, till the lady is safe under the protection of the Duke of Guise, we pause for no one, so there must be no pretences of fatigue."

"Fear not," replied the girl; "I can bear more than she can. But how can we get down the bank?"

"There is a short ladder," said the young count. "Come quick!" And in a moment after he aided Marie de Clairvaux to descend. It was all done in a moment. The girl followed the lady, the ladder was taken into the boat, and, with joy and satisfaction beyond all conception, the fair girl, whose days had lately passed so sorrowfully, felt the little vessel fluctuating beneath her feet as she seated herself in it; while Charles of Montsoreau, with a man who had been waiting therein, pushed the boat away from the bank, and a boy seated at the stern guided it into the deeper parts of the water. There was but a few words spoken by any one.

"You are sure, Ignati," said the young count, "that you marked every rock and shoal as you came up?"

"Quite sure," replied the boy; and leaving the current, which was rapid and powerful, to bear them on, without disturbing its smooth surface by the splash of oars, they glided along down the stream, now in moonlight, now in shade, with the high rocky banks and promontories, filled with holes and caverns, which border the valley of the Charente, now seen in bright clear light, now rising up against the silvery sky, wrapped in deep shadows and obscurity.

The hand of Marie de Clairvaux lay clasped in that of her lover as they sat side by side. Their hearts were full, though their lips were silent; and the eyes of both were raised towards the sky, filled with thankfulness, and hope, and trust. Thus they went on for about two hours, saying but little, and that little in low and murmured tones; but, as they went, Charles of Montsoreau found occasion to tell her that he had luckily effected a new arrangement, and that he had procured means of landing and proceeding on their journey before they reached Jarnac.

At length, after a voyage of about two hours and a

half, as the moon was beginning to decline, a rushing sound was heard over the bow of the boat, and the waters of the river were seen fretting against a dike, which had been built to confine it in its proper course. A couple of houses, sheltered by two sloping hills, which swept down to the very bank of the river, appeared upon the left hand, with what seemed a number of living objects gathered about them.

Marie de Clairvaut turned her eyes to Charles of Montsoreau with some apprehension, but he pressed her hand tenderly, saying, "Fear not, fear not. They are my own people, waiting for our arrival."

The boy guided the boat safely up to the landing-place, and the question, "Who comes here?" was demanded, as if at a regular warlike post.

"A friend," replied Charles of Montsoreau, and gave the word *Chateau Thierry*. The man grounded his arms, and Charles of Montsoreau, springing to the shore, led Marie de Clairvaut and the girl who had followed her to one of the houses, where everything seemed prepared for their reception.

He paused for a moment to gaze upon the face of the girl who had accompanied them, and to ask her name, which he found to be Louise. The countenance was good; and frank, and gentle, and the natural spirit of physiognomy which is in every one's brain gave a pleasant reading of that face.

"Listen to me," he said, speaking to her. "As you have preferred the service of this lady to remaining behind where I found you, depend upon it every attention and devotion that you show to her by the way will be taken note of and well rewarded; and do not forget, that, if possible, you are never to leave her, but to do everything in your power, under all circumstances, to enable her to reach the Duke of Guise, who is her near relation, and whom we expect to find at Blois or Chartres."

"Is she so great a lady?" said the girl.

"She is the niece and ward of the great Duke of Guise," replied Charles of Montsoreau; "and the time is rapidly coming when those who have injured and offended her will be severely punished, and those who have assisted and befriended her rewarded far beyond their expectations."

Having said this, he left them to see that all was properly prepared; and in a few minutes more Marie de Clair-

vant, with the girl who accompanied her, was in one of the rude but roomy chaises of the country, and, with six horses to drag it through the heavy roads, was rolling away in the direction of Limoges, followed by Charles of Montsoreau and a party of five or six servants on horseback.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE autumn was far spent, an early winter had set intensely in, frost once more covered the ground, the last leaves had fallen from the trees, and, looking round upon the thick tapestry that covered the walls, and the immense logs of wood which blazed in the deep arched fireplace, the tenant of a splendid room in the old chateau of Blois smiled when he thought of where he had last passed a similar frosty day : in arms in the open field against the enemies of the land.

Now, however, the appearance of Henry, duke of Guise, was in some degree different from that which it had ever been before. Loaded with honours by the king, adored by the people, gratified in every demand, ruling almost despotically the state, the height to which he had risen had impressed itself upon his countenance, and added to that expression of conscious power which his face had ever borne, the expression also of conscious success. His dress, too, was more splendid than it had ever been ; not that he had adopted the silken refinements of Epemon or Joyeuse ; not that his person was loaded with jewels, or that his ear hung with rubies ; but everything that he wore was of the richest and most costly kind ; and as he stood ready dressed to go down to hold the table of grand master of the king's household and generalissimo of the armies of France, at which Henry himself and all the great nobles of the court were that day to be present, it would have been difficult throughout all Europe—nay, it would have been impossible—to match his princely look, or to excel in taste his rich apparel. One single star gleamed upon his bosom, the collars of manifold orders hung around his neck, the hilt of his sword was of massy gold, and thin

lines of gold embroidery marked the slashings of his green velvet doublet, where, slightly opening as he moved with easy dignity, the pure white lining below appeared from time to time. There were no jewels on his hands but one large signet ring. He wore no hat, and the brown hair curling round his forehead was the only ornament that decked his head. There was a jewel in his belt, indeed, a single jewel of high price, and the pommel of the dagger, which lay across his loins, was a single emerald.

From time to time while he had been dressing—indeed, we might say almost every minute—some messenger, or page, or courier appeared, bearing him news or letters from the various provinces of the realm. His secretary stood beside him, but every line was read first by the duke's own eye, and then he handed them to Pericard, either with some brief comment or some direction in regard to the answer to be returned.

"Ha!" he said, smiling, after reading one epistle. "There is a curious letter from good Hubert de Vins. Hubert loves me as his own brother, and yet, to read that letter, one would think he respected me but little. There is no bad name he does not give me, down to Maheutre and Huguenot, because I trust in King Henry, who, he says, is as treacherous as a Picardy cat."

"I think with Monsieur de Vins, your highness," said Pericard, who had been reading the letter while the duke spoke, "that, trusting in the semblances of the king's love, you expose your life every hour as if it were a value neither to yourself, nor your friends, nor your country."

"You mistake, Pericard," replied the duke; "I trust not in Henry's love at all. Whether it be feigned, or whether it be real for the time, matters not a straw. If it be feigned, it does me no harm, but, on the contrary, daily gives me greater power; if it be true, I receive the benefits thereof for the time, well knowing that to-morrow or the next day it will change completely into hate. I'll tell you what it is I trust to, Pericard: not to the king's love, but to his good sense; for, were I dead to-morrow, he could be ten times worse than he is to-day. I am he who stands between him and destruction! Ah! who have we here?" he continued, as the door again opened. "From Provence;" and, taking the letter from the hand of a dusty courier, he read it over attentively and threw it to Pericard, saying, "That is good news

surely, Pericard! In the room of the two deputies who were so difficult to manage that we were obliged to stuff them with carp and truffles till they both fell sick and died, we have got two steady Leaguers not to be shaken by threats or moved by choice meats. If we could dislodge that viper, Epernon, from Angoumois, all would be clear before us till we reached the confines of Henry of Navarre. But Epernon is raising troops, I hear—" he added, although he saw that some one had entered the room and was approaching him.

"Which he will soon disband, Monsieur de Guise," said the stranger, "as I am charged by the king to set out to-morrow morning to give the duke his commands to that effect."

"By my life, Monsieur Miron," said the duke, "you will have soon to lay aside altogether the exercise of your Esculapean powers, at least upon his majesty's person. You show yourself so skillful in healing the wounds of the state, and curing the sickness of the body politic."

"Your highness is good unto me," replied the king's physician, looking humble; "but I came to pay my respects to your highness now, not having seen you since the exile of Villeroy, Pinar, and the rest. I hope your highness does not think that their disgrace is likely to affect your interests at court."

"Not in the least, Monsieur Miron," replied the duke; "far from it. I seek to exercise no influence among the king's ministers. Those who are good for the state are good to me. On the king's good feeling and good sense I firmly rely."

"Somebody," said the physician, "informed his majesty that you were grieved at the dismissal of Villeroy. I may tell him, then, that such is not the case, for he was pained to hear it."

"Tell him so, I beseech you," replied the duke. "I know the king would not wish, without some good reason, to dismiss any one that I especially esteemed."

"Most assuredly," replied Miron; "but might I give your highness one slight warning as a friend, and a most sincere one?"

"Most gratefully will it be received," replied the duke. "Speak freely, my learned sir," he continued, as the physician had fixed his eyes upon Pericard. "Our good Pericard is as silent as your friend."

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Death, Monsieur Miron, who tells no tales, you know, as those on this side the grave, whatever he may do to those on the other. What is it you have to say?"

"It is this, my lord," replied Miron. "I should tell you first that I do believe the king sincerely loves you, and that, if you deal but politicly with his humours, there is none in whom he will place such confidence. But my good lord the king's temperament is a strange one. I speak as a physician. It is indeed injured by some excesses; but, though by nature full of the mercurial character, there was always much of the saturnine in it. The balance between these has been overthrown by many circumstances, and in certain conjunctions of the planets he is strangely and variably affected. Such also is the case in the time of these hard frosts. In soft and genial weather he may be easily dealt with: you will then find him but as a thing of wax in your hands. But I beseech you, my lord, remember that, when the pores of the earth are shut up and filled with this black and acrid frost, 'tis then that all the humours of the body are likewise congealed, and Henry is at that time filled with black and terrible vapours, which are dangerous not alone to himself, but to every one who approaches him unprepared. I say it advisedly, my good lord. Any one who urges the king far at such moments is in peril of his life.* But I must say no more, for here comes a messenger."

"I thank you most sincerely," replied the duke. "Who is this packet from? I must speedily descend to supper."

"From his highness of Mayenne," replied the messenger. "He said it was matter of life and death, and commanded me to ride post haste."

"Ha!" said Guise, as he opened the packets and saw the contents. "Our cousin of Savoy in arms in France. This shows the need of unanimity among ourselves. He shall find himself mistaken, however, if he thinks Guise will forget his duty to his country. Write Charles of Mayenne word, Pericard, to bring his troops into such a position that they can act against Savoy at a moment's notice, and tell him that he shall have orders to do so ere three days be over. Send, too, to Rouen, the king

* Such, and in such terms, strange and fantastic, as may seem, was undoubtedly the warning given by the physician to the Duke of Guise not many days before the catastrophe.

them for their attachment; and see that our agent at the court of Rome have full instructions regarding the Count de Soissons. Ha! here comes our brother of the church. My good lord cardinal, we will descend together. We shall scarcely reach the hall before the king arrives."

The person who entered bore a strong family likeness to the duke, but was neither so tall nor so powerful in person. He was dressed in the crimson robes of a prince of the church of Rome; and his countenance, which had much shrewdness and some dignity, accorded well with his station. Miron had retired quietly while the duke spoke; a sign had dismissed the messenger from the Duke of Mayenne, and none but Pericard remained in the room. But yet the cardinal spoke in a whisper to his brother, who merely smiled, replying, "Come, come, we have no time now to jest." And, thus saying, he led the way down to a hall, where supper was prepared at the table of the grand master for all the most distinguished guests then resident at Blois.

The table was covered, as was then much the custom, with jewelled plate of many kinds, and various fanciful devices. The room was in a blaze of light, and all the guests but the king and his particular train had already arrived. They were standing back from the table, and, gathered together in the magnificent dresses of that period, formed splendid groups in different parts of the chamber, while sewers and other attendants, hurrying backward and forward, brought in the various dishes and set them in their regular order.

The appearance of the duke and his brother, the Cardinal de Guise, occasioned an instant movement among the guests, and the proudest there bowed lowly to the gallant prince, whose fortunes hitherto had gone on from height to height. Nobles and generals of the highest distinction eagerly sought a word with him, and bishops and prelates of many a various character crowded forward but to touch the hand of one who had stood forth so prominently in defence of the church.

In a few minutes the table was covered with the various dishes, and intimation that supper was served was immediately given to the king, who appeared the moment after, while the Duke of Guise advanced to the door to receive him, and, with every testimony of lowly respect, led him to the raised seat appointed for him.

The king was followed by six gentlemen, for whom places had been reserved, and among them the eye of Guise rested upon Villequier. That eye flashed for a single moment as it saw him; but the next instant all was calm, and the duke noticed him especially by an inclination of the head.

As soon as the king had taken his seat, saying, "Sit, my lord duke, I pray you; stand upon no farther ceremonies," Guise and the rest seated themselves at the table, and the monarch and his princely officer bent forward to say some complimentary nothing to each other, each at the same time unfolding the napkin that lay before them. As they did so, from the napkin of the Duke of Guise fell out upon his plate a folded letter; and Henry, who was all gayety and condescension at that moment, exclaimed aloud with a light laugh, "Some letter from his lady-love, upon my honour. Read, read; my lord duke. Read, read! Carvers, touch not a dish till the duke has read."

The duke opened the letter smiling, while the king bent a little towards that side, as if jestingly, to see the contents. All eyes round the table were fixed upon those two; and it was seen that the colour mounted into the cheek of the Duke of Guise, that his brow gathered into a frown, and his lip curled with a scornful smile. As far as the paint on the king's countenance would admit, he appeared to turn pale at the same moment. But Guise, crushing the letter together in his hand, threw it contemptuously under the table, saying aloud, "They dare not!"*

None but the king around the table knew to what these words alluded: but Henry had seen the words, "Beware, Duke of Guise, your life is in danger every day. There are those around you from morning to night who are ready to spill your blood."

The duke seemed to forget the matter in a moment, and by the graces of his demeanour soon caused it to be forgotten also by all those around. Henry resumed his gayety and tranquillity; wine and feasting did their part; and, some short time after, the king, with his glass filled with the most exquisite wine of France, exclaimed, "Let us drink to some one, my lord duke. To whom shall it be?"

* Some of the duke's historians say that he did not speak the words aloud, but merely wrote at the bottom of the note, "On n'oseroit," and then threw it under the table.

"It is for your majesty to command," replied the duke, gayly. "Let us drink to our good friends the Huguenots!"

"Willingly, willingly," cried Henry, laughing. "To the Huguenots, cousin of Guise: ay, and to our good barricaders, too; let us not forget them."

The king smiled, and many around smiled also, at what they thought would be a mortification to the duke. But Guise answered immediately, after drinking the toast, "It is well bethought of, your majesty, while you give us the health of your bitter enemies, to give us that of your most faithful servants, who will never cease to defend you against them."

He spoke with such an air of good-humour, that none could see he had taken any offence, and this matter was also forgotten in a few moments. Shortly before the dessert was placed upon the table, a page slipped a small scrap of paper, with a few words written upon it, into the hands of the duke, who gathered the meaning at a single glance, while his whole countenance brightened with satisfaction. "Come, Monsieur de Villequier," he said, "honour me by drinking to a mutual relation of ours. Here is to Mademoiselle de Clairvaux, as sweet, as good, as fair a lady as any in France. Let us drink her health, and a gallant husband to her soon."

"Willingly, willingly, my lord," replied Villequier; "and I wish your lordship would let me name that husband. But here is to her health." And he drank the wine.

"Nay," answered Guise, "that cannot be, Monsieur de Villequier, for I have named him myself already."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Villequier, with no slight surprise in his look. But he instantly overcame the first emotion, adding, "I suppose, then, that the young lady is under your protection at the present moment?"

"At which you can neither be displeased nor surprised, Monsieur de Villequier," replied the duke, still bearing a courteous and affable look. "As you know you swore upon the mass some weeks ago that she was not under your protection, and that you knew not where she was, it must be a relief to your mind to find that she is well cared for."

"Oh, my good Lord of Guise," replied Villequier, in the same courteous tone, "no one ever doubts that his highness of Guise cares for every one that comes with-

in his influence. Have we not an instance of it here, when, no sooner is one of the good duke's friends, and the allotted husband of his fair niece, dead, than another of his friends is raised to the same happy prospect. But, pray, may I ask if the young lady herself is well pleased with this rapid substitution of lovers?"

"Delighted, I believe," replied the duke, with a smile full of meaning. "Though I have had no particular communication with her yet, inasmuch as, it having been discovered that she had escaped from the hands of some base persons who unjustly detained her, the worthy and respectable governor of Angoumois took pains to guard the country all round, in order to stop her on her journey to Blois. This has much delayed her coming, and would most likely have delayed it still longer, had she not taken refuge with Monsieur and Madame Montmorin, till I sent a force sufficient to open the way for her through all the La Valettes in France. It is thus only this night, nay, this very moment, that I hear of her arrival in Blois."

"Well, my lord," answered Villequier, with a laugh, "it is evident that he who attempts to strive with the Duke of Guise, either in stratagem or in force, must be a bold man, and should be a clever one. As I told your highness, Mademoiselle de Clairvaut was not in my hands, but how she was set free from the hands in which she was placed must remain a mystery rather difficult to solve. A servant-girl, it seems, became the immediate instrument; but the skill with which every trace of her path was concealed, and even the manner in which her flight itself was effected, bespeaks a better brain than that of a peasant of Angoumois. Is it permitted, my lord, to ask the name of the favoured gentleman you destine for her husband?"

"His majesty receives his court to-night, I think," replied the duke, "and then, Monsieur de Villequier, I shall have much pleasure in presenting that gentleman to you. But, Monsieur de Villequier, if, as your words imply, you have suffered yourself to be outmanœuvred in this business, I will mortify your pride in your own skill by telling you that you have been foiled and frustrated by no efforts of mine, but by the wit of a girl, and the courage and stratagem of a mere youth. My lord the king, may I humbly beseech your majesty to let us drink better policy to Monsieur de Villequier."

Henry laughed lightly and drank the wine; and the rest of the supper passed off gayly, though Villequier from time to time fell into a momentary fit of thought, from which he was twice roused to find the eye of the Duke of Guise upon him. At length, as the hour for the reception of the court in the king's own apartments approached, Henry rose and retired, followed by Villequier and the rest of the gentlemen who had accompanied him.

The Duke of Guise paused for a moment after, speaking rapidly to several of those around him; and then, calling a page, he whispered to him, "Go with speed to Monsieur Chapelle Marteau. Tell him to let me see him at midnight. I should also like to see Monsieur de Magnac, one of the Presidents of the Nobles. You will very likely find him in his cabinet at the Palais de Justice. I would fain see them both. Gentlemen, the king will soon be in the hall, where you had better meet his majesty. I must be absent for a few moments, and you will therefore pardon me."

Thus saying, the duke left them, and, followed by one or two attendants, proceeded to the apartments assigned especially to himself.

In the mean while, the rest of the nobles hurried from the chateau to various parts of the town, in order to accompany their wives and daughters to a great assembly of the court which was to be held that night in the grand hall of the castle. In the same hall the meetings of the States-General of the kingdom usually took place, when the three orders assembled together; but, as it was considered probable that they would deliberate separately for some days to come, the hall had been arranged that night, as we have said, for the reception of the court; and in it soon appeared almost all the splendid nobility of France, brought into Blois by the meeting of the States.

The Duke of Guise, however, had not yet arrived when the king appeared, and much was the surprise and wonder of all that he did not show himself. In about ten minutes after, however, there was a whisper near the great doors of "the duke! the duke is coming! He is in the corridor speaking to Brissac!" and, after the pause of an instant, the two wings of the door were thrown open, and Guise, followed by a long and brilliant train, and himself decorated with the collars and

jewels of all the first orders in Europe, entered the great hall and advanced towards the king. With him appeared the lovely form of Marie de Clairvaut, leaning on his left arm, while, dressed with all that splendour to which the fashion of the day lent itself, appeared upon his right the young Count of Logères, somewhat thinner and somewhat paler than he had been when he before presented himself at the court of France, but with his head high, and proud with the best kind of pride, the consciousness of rectitude, and his eye bright with the excitement of the moment and the scene. The eyes of Marie de Clairvaut were bent down, and there was a slight but not ungraceful embarrassment in her manner, from the consciousness that many late events which had befallen her would attract more than usual attention to herself.

Advancing straight towards the king and queen, the Duke of Guise took Marie's hand in his, saying, "Allow me to present to your majesties my dear niece and ward, Mademoiselle de Clairvaut, and permit me also to present to you my friend"—and he laid particular emphasis on the word—"the Count of Logères, whom, with your majesty's permission and this fair lady's consent, I destine to be her husband. Were it possible to give him a higher treasure than herself, I should be bound to do it, as, if it had not been for him, and for his skill, courage, and determination on two occasions, my head would have been now in the dust, and I should not now have had the hope of serving your majesty well, faithfully, and successfully, as I trust to do."

From his first entrance, and while he spoke, a low murmur had run through the whole court, some inquiring who the gentleman was that accompanied him, the few who knew Charles of Montsoreau whispering his name, and all, as it passed round, expressing their surprise at the reappearance of one supposed to be dead. The Duke of Guise in the mean time turned to Villequier, who had at first become pale at the sight of Charles of Montsoreau.

"Monsieur de Villequier," said the duke, "you were desirous of knowing the name of the friend for whom I destine my niece. Allow me to present him to you in the person of the Count of Logères, whom I trust you will soon congratulate upon their marriage." And, while he spoke, he ran the finger of his right hand gen-

ly down his baldric towards the hilt of his sword, with a gesture significant enough, but which could only be seen by Villequier.

Having said this, the duke and his party retired to a space left for them on the king's right hand, and, the various entertainments of the evening commenced, the king, who had been rather amused than otherwise at the reappearance of Charles of Montsoreau, gave himself up to one of those bursts of gayety which occasionally ran into somewhat frantic excesses.

We cannot pause here to describe the scene. All was splendour and amusement; and in the light court of France the circumstances in which Marie de Clairvaut was placed were sufficient to draw around her all the gay, and the gallant, and the idle. Unaccustomed to such scenes—less accustomed, indeed, than even she was—the eye of Charles of Montsoreau turned towards her from time to time, with perhaps some anxiety, to see how she would bear the homage that was paid to her; whether, in short, it would be the same Marie de Clairvaut in the midst of flattery and adulation, and that bright and glittering scene, that it had been with him in the calm quiet of country life, in more than one solitary journey, and in many a scene of peril, danger, and distress. Whenever he looked that way, however, he saw the same sweet, calm, retiring demeanour; and more than once he found her eyes seeking him out in some distant part of the hall, and her lips light up with a bright smile as soon as their glances met. He felt, and he felt proudly, that there was none there present who could doubt that her guardian's choice was her own also.

With the irregularity which marked all Henry's conduct at that period, after remaining for half an hour with the appearance of the utmost enjoyment, the king suddenly became sombre and gloomy; and, after biting his lip and knitting his brow for a few minutes, turned and quitted the hall. All was immediately the confusion of departure, and Charles of Montsoreau made his way across to where the Duke of Guise was seen standing, towering above all the rest. The young count had remarked that, in the course of the evening, the duke had been speaking long and eagerly with a lady of extraordinary beauty who stood at some distance from the royal party; and he had heard her named as the Marchioness of Noirmontier with a light jest from more than one

tongue at her intimacy with the duke. When he now reached the side of that prince, she had passed on, and was bending over Mademoiselle de Clairvaut, and speaking to her with a look of tenderness and admiration.

"Come on, count, come on," said the duke, in a low but somewhat sharp tone, as soon as his young friend joined him. And they advanced to the side of the two ladies at the moment that Madame de Noirmoutier was urging Marie to spend a few days with her at her beautiful chateau some way down the Loire. The duke, however, did not suffer his ward to reply.

"I fear, dear madam," he said, in a decided and somewhat stern tone, "that it cannot be."

The colour rushed violently up into the cheeks of Madame de Noirmoutier, and the tears seemed ready to spring into her eyes. But the duke added, "Logères, escort Marie back to my apartments. If you will permit me, madam, I will be your attendant to your carriage, and explain why my young ward cannot have the extreme pleasure and honour you intended for her."

"It needs no explanation, your highness," replied the marchioness, raising her head proudly. "I intended to have stayed some days longer in this neighbourhood; but, as she cannot come to me, I will return at once to Paris."

The duke looked mortified, but still offered her his hand; and, when he rejoined his own party in the apartments assigned to him, he was somewhat gloomy and abstracted.

CHAPTER XVII.

"His highness, sire," said one of the attendants to Henry III. on the following day, "his highness of Guise is not to be found this morning. His servants say that he has gone forth on horseback, followed only by two grooms; but whither he has turned his steps no one seems rightly to know."

"Seek him with Madame de Noirmoutier," said Villequier, who stood beside the king.

But Henry, however, who was in no mood for jesting

at that moment, replied sharply, "He is playing with me! He is playing with me! He mocks me! He will repent it some day! And I think you mock me too, Villequier, to talk of Madame de Noirmoutier at this moment. Have you not heard this business of Savoy? He knew it last night, and said nothing of it; and I'll tell you what more he has done, Villequier, which you may like as little as I like the other. He has fixed the day for the marriage of his niece with that bold young Logères. But this business of Savoy is terrible, and these mutinous States will be the ruin of the realm."

"Sire," replied Villequier, "your majesty must remember that I am somewhat in darkness, in twilight at least. I have heard a rumour that the Savoyard is in arms in France. But what of the States?"

"Why, they are even now discussing," exclaimed the king, "whether there shall be war or not, even to defend our invaded territory. There are the Clergy now arguing it at the Jacobins, the Nobles in the Palais de Justice, and the Third Estate in the Hôtel de Ville; all, ~~all~~ showing a disposition to hesitate at such a moment; and Guise, the generalissimo of my armies and grand master of my household, absent, Heaven knows where!"

"The devil knows best, most likely," replied Villequier, with a calm smile. "But perhaps the secret may be, that the Duke of Savoy is son-in-law of the King of Spain. Now the King of Spain has been a good friend to the Duke of Guise, and the good pope used always to say that a Guise never jumped higher than the King of Spain liked."

"By my faith!" replied the king, "I sometimes think that this same gloomy Philip is more sovereign in France than the king thereof. But here come tidings from the Tiers Etats. Come, Monsieur Artau, how have gone the deliberations of the States? What say our good Commons to war with Savoy?"

"They go against it altogether, sire," replied the officer who now entered. "Chapelle Marteau spoke against it vehemently; declared that it was but a plundering excursion of some light troops, who had carried off a few thousand crowns, while it would cost many millions to carry on a war with Savoy: and then up got another, and talked of imposts, and taxes, and the poverty of the state, and said that millions and hundreds of millions had been lost in speculation and extravagance."

If your majesty indeed, he said, would bear two thirds of the expense out of your domain, and would cut down your tall trees or mortgage a part of the royal forests, the Commons would see what could be done."

"By Heaven!" exclaimed Henry, stamping his foot, "when they keep me here, a throned beggar, without a crown in my pocket, to give a jewel to a mistress or a friend, they expect me to carry on the defence of the country at my own expense! On my soul! I have a great mind to cast away the sceptre, to go down into the ranks of a private gentleman, and name my rule-loving mother to govern in my stead: or, faith, I care not if it were Guise himself. He would teach these surly citizens what it is to have an iron rod over their heads. By the Lord! he would not spare the backs of the porkers. Hie thee, good Artau, to the Clergy at the Jacobins; see what they say to the matter. And what say you, Villequier, to my scheme of abdicating?"

"Why, sire," replied Villequier, calmly, "I think it is an excellent good one. But I hope, in the first place, that you will give a few thoughts to what I told you concerning the young Marquis de Montsoreau and the hundred thousand crowns he promised on the day of his marriage with Mademoiselle de Clairvant. You know your majesty has claimed the lion's share; and seventy-five thousand crowns at the present moment, or any time between this and Christmas, might serve to give your majesty a new lace to your doublet, or a new doublet to your lace, for to my mind both are plaguy rusty. Now, though the reappearance of this young Count of Logères will cut down the amount of his brother's estates most terribly, yet that affects me more than you, sire; and, by having made inquiries, I find, to a certainty, that he is quite capable of paying the money the moment the marriage is concluded."

"Seventy-five thousand crowns!" repeated the king, thoughtfully. "Seventy-five thousand crowns! Why, my friend, I think that neither you nor I have heard of such a thing since we had beards. But how does all this square with my giving the crown to Guise, which you approved so highly?"

"Oh, extremely well, sire," replied Villequier. "The crown I would have you give him is neither the crown of France nor of Poland: I would give him an immortal crown, sire. You will fit him better, depend upon it,

that way than with a terrestrial one. His aspiring spirit seeks the skies, and, could I deal with him, should very soon find them. However, you will remember that your royal word, as well as mine, is pledged to the young Marquis de Montsoreau."

A dark smile came over the king's face. "We will see, Villequier; we will see," he said. "My word must be kept, and shall not be broken. The morning of Christmas-day the duke has fixed for the marriage. Who knows what may happen between this and then, Villequier. She is then absolutely your ward, failing the Duke of Guise, and we will have no hesitation or delay when we have the power to compel obedience. But we must be very cautious, Villequier; we must be very cautious. We must neither seem pleased with this business of the marriage, for then he would suspect us of some concealed design; nor must we oppose him strongly, because that would put him on his guard; and I fear me that all the crowns in France could not do me so much good, as the Duke of Guise could do me harm if he were offended."

"Without being slain," replied Villequier, in a low tone. "Oh no, my lord, I know well, a wounded boar is always the most dangerous."

The king smiled again in the same dark and sinister manner, but he made no reply to Villequier's insinuation, perhaps still doubtful of his own purposes, perhaps prevented from speaking openly by the return of Monsieur D'Artau.

"What! so soon come back!" exclaimed Henry. "You cannot judge of the tone of the assembly, D'Artau. You should have heard more of their deliberations."

"There was no more to hear, sire," replied D'Artau. "The Clergy were all agreed; everybody had become wonderfully pacific in a moment. There had not been one voice raised for war, and fifty or sixty were raised against it; so their deliberations, as I have said, were almost concluded at the time I entered. They went to no vote, indeed, upon the subject, but agreed to pass on to another question."

"The villains! the crows!" exclaimed the king. "What did they give us as reasons, did you hear?"

"Why, they said, sire," replied the officer, "that they had taxed themselves, time after time, for the purpose of carrying on the war with the Huguenots; that they

had now again taxed themselves to the utmost of their means, and would not consent that any part of the sum thus raised should be diverted to make war upon their fellow-Catholics, while nothing has yet been done against the enemies of their faith."

"The specious hypocrites!" exclaimed Henry. "But what said they all to the absence of the Duke of Guise?"

"It was said, sire, as I heard, by several people, that he had evidently absented himself from policy, not wishing to oppose your majesty, and yet unwilling to go to war with Savoy. Some said, indeed, sire," he continued, "that Chapelle Marteau had acknowledged that this was the case. But that could not be so either, for the duke sent for the President of the Tiers Etats last night without being able to find him. That I know from the servants, so that what Chapelle said must have been out of his own head; while, on the contrary, I hear that Monsieur Magnac and the Count de Brissac, who were with the duke for more than an hour last night, spoke vehemently against the Duke of Savoy among the Nobles at the Palais de Justice. Thus the Nobles were as unanimous for the war as the other two States were against it."

"That should be the footfall of a Guise in the ante-chamber," said the king. "Who is without there?"

"The Duke of Guise, your majesty," said a page, entering almost as the king spoke, "craves audience for a moment."

"Admit him," said the king; "admit him:" and the next instant the Duke of Guise entered hastily, in a riding dress.

"Your majesty's gracious pardon," he said, "for presenting myself before you thus: but I heard tidings as I came along which I believed might give you great and exceeding pain."

"Well may it give me pain, cousin of Guise," replied the king. "Well may it give me pain, to find that my subjects are so insensible to their own honour or to mine, as to suffer a foreign enemy to encamp upon our native soil without doing what best we may to drive him forth."

"It may, indeed, sire," replied the Duke of Guise. "But the matter has not been properly explained; and neither the Tiers Etats nor the Clergy have seen it in its true light."

"But where was the Duke of Guise to explain it?"

demanded Henry. "Where was the generalissimo of my armies, the lieutenant-general of my kingdom, the grand master of my household, the man whose voice is only second to my own in France; ay, and, by Heavens! whose voice is sometimes first likewise! Where was he, I say; and how came he not to be present!"

"From the simplest of all possible causes, sire," replied the duke. "The business regularly appointed for this morning's discussion by the States was a mere trifling matter of some petty impost. I had not told your majesty last night of this affair of Savoy, because I thought it would spoil the pleasure of your evening, and perhaps disturb your rest. I myself, however, neglected nothing. I instantly despatched orders, in your majesty's name, to my brother of Mayenne, to advance towards Piedmont with troops from Lyons. Before I rested, I sent for the Presidents of the Nobles and of the Tiers Etats. The latter, however, was not to be found; but I told Brissac and Magnac what had occurred, and begged them to prepare all minds for vigorous measures against Savoy, without disclosing the actual fact of aggression, the fact having only reached me by the excessive speed of my brother's courier. I felt perfectly certain that the news could not be known till to-night or to-morrow morning; and how it happened that your majesty was informed of it so early as to send down a message thereon to each of the Three Estates, I really do not know."

"Very simply, my good cousin of Guise," replied the king, whose face had now relaxed from the harsh and acrid aspect it had borne throughout the morning; "it was Miron told me."

"I had forgotten, I had forgotten," replied the duke.

"He was in the room when the packet arrived, and I must have given vent to my thoughts aloud."

"Well, under such circumstances," replied the king, "I suppose I must pardon, cousin of Guise, your having gone to pay your homage somewhere else, as Monsieur de Villequier insinuates, when the king much wanted your presence."

"Monsieur de Villequier is, as usual, wrong," replied the Duke of Guise, frowning upon him. "Where he seeks or finds such abundance of evil motives to attribute to other men, I do not know. May it not be in his own bosom! I went, for your majesty's service, to inspect a body of three thousand men, about to march

early this morning from Launcome to join the army of the Duke of Nevers, and it was only as I returned that I heard of this unfortunate business."

"Perhaps his highness thinks," said Villequier, not unwilling to increase any feeling of ill-will between the king and the duke, "perhaps his highness thinks that your majesty would have done more wisely to have waited till his return, and not to have communicated the news from Savoy at all to the States till you had consulted him upon it."

Villequier had almost said, "till you had asked his permission;" but he feared that a part of the king's anger might fall back upon himself. The Duke of Guise, however, saw through all his purposes in a moment, and replied, "Far from it, Monsieur de Villequier! I think, on the contrary, that I should have done more wisely, if, instead of inspecting the troops at all—although Nevers, who is my enemy, might have reproached me for neglect—I had waited till the king had risen, to convey the expression of his will in person to the States-General. Sire, I humbly crave your majesty's pardon for this one instance of neglect; and, to prove how sorry I am that it has occurred, I will undertake to show the Clergy and Commons such good motives for changing their decision, that your majesty's name and honour shall not suffer by the invasion of your territories unresisted."

"They will refuse you, Guise, they will refuse you," replied the king. "I know them well. You think to rule them, Guise; but the first time you speak of money to Commons or to Clergy, you will find that cabalistic word, money, acts on them as the sign of the cross upon the fiends we read of, and makes the seeming angels resume their shapes of devils in a moment."

"Well, sire, well," exclaimed the Duke of Guise, tossing his lofty head with a proud smile, "if they refuse us, we will shame them. You and I together will put our lances in the rest, as in days of old: we will call the nobility of France about us; and I will promise, at my own expense, without craving these penurious Commons for a sol, with my own men and your majesty's good help, in three weeks' time to drive the Savoyard back to his mountain den. But no, sire, no! They will not refuse me; and I pledge myself, before this hour to-morrow, to bring you such tidings from both Clergy and Commons as you could wish to hear."

"If you do, cousin," cried the king, eagerly, "if you do, you are my best of friends and counsellors for ever."

"Fear not, sire, fear not," replied the Duke of Guise. "I will be bold to undertake it. But I must see the presidents and some of the deputies speedily, to know what are the vain and idle notions on which they have hesitated in regard to a step imperatively necessary. I will, therefore, humbly take my leave, beseeching you to think well of me during my absence, even though my good Lord of Villequier be at your majesty's right elbow."

Thus saying, the duke retired, and the king, turning to Villequier, asked with some anxiety, "Think you, Villequier, that he will succeed?"

"I know not, sire," replied Villequier; "but I should judge not. They have too far committed themselves to retract, let the question be what it would, but are not at all likely to retract where money is concerned."

"Well, well," said the king, "I will hope the best. And now, Villequier, we must think of what can be done, in order not to lose the seventy-five thousand crowns. *Mort Dieu!* What a sum! In the very first place, we must call hither your young friend, wherever he may be, without loss of an hour. We must not have him appear at the court, however. He must lie concealed, but be ready at a moment's notice. Let him bring what men he can with him. But, above all, do not let him forget the crowns, Villequier. Let them be prepared. Nay, smile not, I have a scheme for the purpose which will mature itself in time. But no good plan should ever be hurried, and it should always be formed of elements as ductile as warm wax, that it may fit itself into the mould of circumstances. It will mature itself in time, Villequier; it will mature itself in time. But now to this other terrible business."

"Pray, sire, what is that?" demanded Villequier, with some alarm; for, since his arrival at Blois, Henry had shown so much more activity and application to serious matters, that even his favourite had forgotten his character. "Pray, what terrible business does your majesty speak of?"

"Have you not heard," exclaimed the king, "have you not heard that the boat was upset in coming down the Loire, the boat with the parrots and monkeys; and my great beautiful black ape, *Ridolin-din-din*, was nearly

drowned, and has caught such a cold that it is feared he will die! Sweet creature, he is a beauty, and in his woollen nightcap and long gown is not at all unlike my mother. Poor fellow, have you not heard him coughing in the room beyond? I must go and give him some confection of quinces."

During a considerable portion of the day Henry devoted himself to his ape; but towards evening his anxiety in regard to the States and to the eruption of the Duke of Savoy seized upon him again. This was terribly increased by the arrival of a new courier, bearing more ample particulars than the former. The king slept ill at night, and rose early the next morning; but still all the reports brought him of the disposition of the States made him imagine that no means would be taken to curb the enemy, and that he himself would be left by his subjects the mockery and by-word of Europe, unable to repel the outrages of even the pettiest of all the neighbouring princes. The sneers of many of his favourites and courtiers at the Duke of Guise, too; their ironical smiles at the very idea of his being able to change the announced determination of two great bodies in the State, tended to irritate the king still more, and to drive him almost to madness.

In this state of mind he was walking up and down his chamber, between eleven and twelve o'clock on the succeeding day, when suddenly, hearing the bustle of many feet without, he himself threw open the door, and beheld the Duke of Guise approaching, with his usual train and several other persons.

There was in the noble countenance of the duke the glad consciousness of success; but Henry, eager for confirmation, exclaimed, "What is it, cousin of Guise? What is it? Uncertainty drives me wild."

"Health to your majesty," replied the duke. "These gentlemen who follow me, Messieurs Brissac and Magnac, the Presidents of the Nobility, the Archbishop of Lyons representing the Clergy, and my good friend, Chapelle Marteau, President of the Third Estate, humbly approach your majesty with a petition, that, as the Duke of Savoy has committed a wanton infringement upon the territories of France, you would be graciously pleased to pronounce a declaration of war against that prince, in which your dutiful subjects will aid and support your majesty to the best of their ability."

The king's joy knew no bounds, and, throwing his arms around the Duke of Guise, he kissed him on both cheeks. Recovering himself, however, in a few minutes, he received the deputies from the States with some degree of dignity. His joy, however, was still exuberant; and, in dismissing the petitioners, he said that the declaration should be immediately issued, and that he would trust to his best friend and wisest counsellor, pointing to the Duke of Guise, to repel speedily, with that unconquerable hand which had won so many victories, this new aggression upon the territory of France.

As soon as the deputies were gone, he burst forth again in the same strain, vowing to the duke that he loved him beyond everything on earth; that his attachment should be unalterable and inviolate; and that, whatever might be said or urged against the duke, he would never believe it.

"Cousin of Guise," he exclaimed, "there are people who would fain persuade me that you aim at my crown, and perhaps there are others who may try to persuade you that I aim at your liberty or life. I know there are."

"Sire, we neither of us believe them," replied the duke.

"Let us never believe them," answered the king; "let us never believe them. Let us swear, Guise, let us swear to hold good faith, and undoubting sincerity, and true friendship to each other for ever! Let us swear it upon the altar even now! Let us swear it by the Holy Communion, by which we dare not swear falsely, and then the insinuations of our enemies will be as empty air!"

"Most willingly, sire," replied the duke; "I am ready this moment. It is near the hour of mass, and, having nothing in my heart but good towards your majesty, I am ready this very moment."

"Come, then, come to the chapel," cried the king. And, taking the Duke of Guise by the hand, he led the way, followed by only the two attendants who were in the anteroom. In ten minutes more the king and the duke might be seen kneeling before the same altar, calling down the wrath of God upon their heads if they ever did one act of enmity towards each other, drinking of the same consecrated cup, and dividing the host between them.*

* This awful fact is but too certain.

CHAPTER XVIII.

It was a bright, clear frost; all the ancient houses and streets of that most curious and interesting old town, called Blois, was seen clear and defined, without the slightest thin particle of smoke or haze; and from the high windows of the chamber of Catharine de Medicis, the servant who sat and gazed out might see the slightest object that passed along the road below.

As she thus sat and gazed, her eyes fell upon a glittering troop of cavaliers, who issued forth from the castle gates and took their way through the town; and she could see the princely form of the Duke of Guise, and the strong frame of Brissac, and the graceful person of Charles of Montsoreau, riding nearly abreast at the head of the troop.

"The duke has gone forth, may it please your majesty," said the woman, turning to the bed on which lay Catharine de Medicis, sick in body and uneasy in mind. "The duke has gone forth, and a large train with him."

"Then the king will soon be here," replied the queen-mother. "Go into the farther chamber, good Bridget, and wait there till he leaves me. If Madame de Noirmoutier arrives from Paris before he is gone, bid her wait there too. I will see her after, and be glad to see her."

The attendant had scarcely retired, when Henry III. himself entered with a slow step, a dull, frowning brow, and lips turned down, giving his countenance a diabolical expression of sneering malice, which contrasted strongly with the white and red paint which he had used, and the gay foppery of his apparel.

"You sent for us, good mother," he said. "How goes it with you? Has the fever left you, or do you still suffer?"

"My sufferings are of no moment," replied Catharine de Medicis. "They will soon pass, Henry, and I shall be well again. But the illnesses of states pass not so soon, my son; and upon your acts, at the present moment, depends the welfare of France for centuries."

"I know it, madam," replied Henry, sullenly. "But may I ask upon what particular occasion your majesty has thus resumed the maternal rod?"

"The occasion is this, my son," replied the queen: "I find that you are opposing Guise when you have no power to oppose him; and you are opposing him in things where your opposition will not increase your power, but will increase his. Were you to oppose him firmly but steadfastly on points where reason, and right, and the welfare of the state were upon your side, however blind they might be for a time, the people would come over to your side in the end. But if you oppose him in things where your pride, or your vanity, or your selfishness is concerned, depend upon it his party will every day increase; for Guise having identified himself with the people and the Catholic Church, his foibles will be treated far more leniently by both church and people than yours."

"Guise! Guise! Guise!" cried the king, in a bitter tone. "For ever Guise! I am sick to death of the very name. What would you have, madam? Have I not yielded almost everything to him? Have not all his demands been granted, till they become so numerous that I have not wherewithal to stop their mouths? Did I not sign the decree of July? Did I not declare old scarlet Bourbon next heir to the crown? Did I not satisfy the cravings of Nemours and of Mayenne? Did I not banish Epemon; give the duke all sorts of posts; yield him up towns and cities? Did I not render him king of one half of France? What is it that I have refused him?"

"In many points you mistake, my son," replied the queen. "You have yielded more than one of these things, not to him, but to the League. You refused to him, too, the sword of Constable; and in that perhaps you were right. At all events, he himself seemed to think that you were so, for he has not pressed the demand: but after promising to the League, as one of their towns of surety, the city of Orleans, which both you and I know was promised, you would now persuade Guise and the League that it was inserted in the edict by mistake, and that the town promised was Dourlans, a heap of hovels on a little hill, as if you thought that, by such a trumpety evasion, you could deceive the keen wit of a Lorraine. Guise, of course, set his foot upon the small deception. But what are you doing now?"

Quarrelling with him because he demands that which has been recognised as a right of every generalissimo in the kingdom; namely, the right of having his own prévôt and guards. Such has ever been the case, as you well know. The matter is a trifle, except to your own jealous disposition; and, even were he not right, it would still be but a trifle. But, when he is right and you are wrong, the refusal is an insult, and the matter becomes of importance."

"Madam," said the king, bitterly, "in spite of all you say, Guise shall not absolutely be King of France. Has he not here, within these three days, refused me an impost necessary to maintain my dignity as a king, and to provide for the safety of the state? Does he not try to keep me a beggar, that I may have no means of asserting my own rights and dignity?"

"No," replied the queen; "no, Henry! He did not refuse you the impost; it was the States. If I heard rightly, he spoke in favour of it."

"Ay, spoke!" cried the king. "But how did he speak? Lukewarmly, unwillingly. The States soon saw which way his wishes turned. Had he not been playing the hypocrite, he would have commanded it in a moment. Did he not show how he could command in that business of Savoy? Four-and-twenty hours were sufficient for him to make every man in Clergy and in Commons eat their words. This is something very like sovereign power, madam. It is power such as I never possessed myself."

"Ay, and then you were grateful to him for its exercise," replied Catharine, "and swore eternal friendship to him on the altar!"

"Certainly; but his ambitious views have become far more outrageous since then," replied the king, angrily. "Has he not exacted that Henry of Navarre shall be excluded by name from the succession? Has he not forced the Count de Soissons to receive absolution from the pope? Has he not blazed abroad, throughout all the world, the letters of the pope himself, thanking him for his efforts to put down heresy, and exhorting him to persevere, as if he and none other were King of France? And now he must have guards, must he! now he must have guards! When will the crown be wanted? His leading staff is already the sceptre, for it sways all things; his chair is already the throne, for from it ema-

nates every movement of the States-General of France. Yes, madam, yes! the throne and sceptre he has gained; and I see the leaves of his ducal coronet gradually changing themselves into fleurs-de-lis, and the band-lets of the close crown ready to meet above his head."

"But to the guards which he demands," said Catharine de Medicis, "he has a right, as lieutenant-general of the kingdom; and why should you oppose him on a point where he is right?"

"Ay, the guards! the guards!" cried Henry. "Let him have them, madam; let him have them. But, nevertheless, in a few days all this will be over." And, so saying, without waiting for farther reply, the king turned and quitted his mother's chamber.

Following a private staircase, which had been so constructed as only to afford a means of communication between the various apartments of the royal family, the king descended to a large chamber or sort of hall, with a deep window looking out towards the Loire. He found already in that chamber several of his most intimate and confidential friends and favourites, who, notwithstanding the high degree of confidence which the king placed in them, viewed the gloomy sullenness of his countenance with some sort of apprehension. In truth, when the fit was upon him, it could never be told where the blow would fall, and he often thus deprived himself of counsel and assistance in his moments of greatest need.

There were some, however, then present, whose purpose it was to exasperate the irritation which he suffered, even at the risk of injuring, in some degree, themselves; and the Maréchal d'Aumont, who had been waiting there for his return, advanced, and, though the king addressed not one word to him, but walked on sullenly till he had almost touched him, he began the conversation first, speaking in a low tone. At length the king stopped abruptly, and gazing in his face, exclaimed, "What, without my veto? without my consent and approbation? Do the States propose that their determinations be law without the king?"

"They do, sire," replied the Maréchal d'Aumont; "and I doubt not they would consider that the approbation of the Duke of Guise would be quite sufficient. They have already made him feel that such is the case; and, for one of his creatures offered me not long ago,

if I would attach myself to him, to make me Governor of Normandy, declaring that the States, at a word from the duke, would make your majesty take it from the Duke of Montpensier, to whom you had given it."

The king paused for a moment, with his hands clasped, and his eyes gazing on the ground. At length he raised them suddenly, saying, "Hark ye, D'Aumont!" and then spoke a few words in a whisper as the marshal bent down his ear.

D'Aumont turned somewhat pale as he listened; his brows knit, and a certain degree of wildness came into his eyes; but he answered, the moment the king had done, "I have not rightly understood your majesty. But it seems to me that the only way a sovereign can deal with rebellious subjects and traitors, is to cause them to be arrested, and deliver them over to their natural judges, to be tried according to law."

Henry waved his hand with a look of contemptuous disappointment, and then added, looking fixedly in D'Aumont's face, "You will be silent!"

"On my honour, sire," replied D'Aumont; and bowing low, but with a face still pale, he quitted the chamber.

Without noticing the other gentlemen who were standing at the farther corner of the room, Henry called to a page, and descended by a staircase into the gardens. He looked up for a moment at the bright and cheerful sunshine, and then upon the clear wintry scene around; but the sight seemed only to plunge him in deeper gloom than ever; and, turning to the boy, he said, "Run back to the hall, and bid Monsieur Crillon come here alone."

He then stood with his arms crossed upon his chest, gazing upon the ground beneath his feet; and, when Crillon approached, he took him by the arm, and walked slowly on with him to the other side of the gardens. He was silent for some moments; but then, turning to Crillon, he said, "You are colonel of my French guards, Crillon, and there is a service which I want you and them to perform."

"Speak, sire," replied Crillon, with his bluff manner. "If there be anything that a soldier and a man of honour can do for you, I am ready to do it."

"Are not kings the highest magistrates in their realm, Crillon?" said the king, gazing in his face; "and have they not a right to judge their own subjects, and pass sentence upon them?"

"I wish to Heaven I were a lawyer, sire," replied the old soldier, "and then I would give your majesty an answer. But, on my honour, at present, I have not considered the subject."

"Well, then, Crillon," continued the king, "to put it in another shape: I have a subject who is more king than myself; who stands between me and the sun; who grasps at all the power in the realm; and who, day by day, is increasing in ambition and insolence."

"Your majesty means the Duke of Guise," said Crillon; "I know him in a minute by the description."

"You are right," said Henry. "But this must not continue long, Crillon. Methinks a small body of my guards, with a brave and determined commander, might rid me of this enemy, of this viper. The most learned lawyers of my realm have assured me that law, and justice, and right authorize me to cause this deed to be done. Will you undertake it, Crillon?"

"Sire," replied Crillon, "I beg your majesty's pardon for reminding you that there is a public executioner appointed by law, and I must not interfere with any other man's office. As to my becoming an assassin, that your majesty does not conceive possible for a moment."

Henry looked bitterly down upon the ground, and then said, in a tone between wrath and anguish, "My friends desert me!"

"No, sire, they don't," replied Crillon. "There is a way of settling the matter which your majesty has forgotten, but which suits my feelings and habits better than any other way. I will now humbly take leave of your majesty, and, going up to the cabinet of his highness of Guise, I will insult him before his people, tell him that he has wronged his king and his country, and bid him accompany me to the field with equal arms. The duke, bad as he is, is not a man to refuse such an invitation; and I think I can assure your majesty that you shall not be troubled with the Duke of Guise for a long time to come."

The king smiled. "Alas! Crillon," he said, "you deceive yourself. You forget what you undertake. Remember, you purpose to strive with, hand to hand, the most powerful man in Europe; the most dexterous and skilful in the use of every weapon upon the face of the earth; the most fearless, the most active, the most prompt; whose hand never trembles, whose eye never

winks, whose foot never slips. He would slay thee, Crillon; he would slay thee in a moment."

"I know it, sire," replied Crillon, calmly, "but not before I have slain him. If I choose to make my body a sheath for his sword, I will make his body a sheath for mine, while my hand holds tight against my breast the hilt of his weapon, to keep in my own spirit till I see his fled. This can be done, sire, and it shall be done within these two hours. I give your majesty good-day, for there is no time to spare."

"Stay, Crillon, stay!" said the king; "I command you not to think of it. If you attempt it you will ruin all my plans. I thank you for your willingness. I owe you no ill-will for your refusal. You will find the page at the door: tell him to send Monsieur de Laugnac to me; Montpizat Laugnac, you know."

"Oh, I know him, sire," replied Crillon. "He is a man of small scraples. I will tell the page as your majesty bids me." And he retired from the presence of the king with a quick step.

The manner in which the king dealt with Laugnac formed a strange contrast with his manner towards Crillon. The moment that the former, who was first gentleman of his chamber, and captain of the famous band of Quarante-cinq, joined him in the garden, the king seized him by the hand, saying, "Laugnac, the Duke of Guise must die!"

"Certainly, sire," replied Laugnac, as if it were a thing perfectly natural. "I have thought so some time."

"Will you undertake it, Laugnac?" demanded the king. "You and your Quarante-cinq?"

"I must have more help than that, sire," said Laugnac, "if it is to be done out in the streets, in the open day, which I suppose must be the case, as he is seldom out at night."

"Oh no, no, no! that will never do!" exclaimed the king. "We must have no rashness, Laugnac. He never rides but with a train, which would set you at defiance; and, besides, the town is filled with Guisards. You would have men enough upon you to slay you all in five minutes. We must put him off his guard; we must lull him into tranquillity, and then draw him to some private place, where you and your good fellows, posted behind the arras, can strike him to the heart before he is aware."

"It is an excellent good plan, sire," exclaimed Laugnac, enthusiastically. "I will speak with my good friend Larchant, who is a bold man and strong, a mortal enemy of the Guise, and a most devoted servant to your majesty. We will soon arrange a plan together which cannot fail."

"Swear him to secrecy," cried the king; "and remember, to-morrow must not pass without its being done. If you can find Villequier too, who ought to be returned by this time, for we have much to do together to-morrow, consult with him, for, in a matter of poisoning or of the knife, you know, Laugnac, he has not his equal in France."

The king smiled, and Laugnac smiled too, at the imputation which they cast on another of the dark deeds exactly similar to those they were both plotting themselves.

"Do you not think, your majesty," said the latter, "that it could be done just about the time of the duke's coming to the council to-morrow?"

"Excellent, good," said the king, "for that will cut him off just ere this marriage that is talked of. But go quick, Laugnac, and make all the arrangements, and let me know the plan to-night; for look where the very man comes:" and he pointed down the alley that led to the chateau, where the Duke of Guise was seen approaching alone.

"He is alone," said Laugnac. "Could it not be done now? I and another could make sure of it if your majesty would detain him here till I seek aid."

"On no account," said the king, grasping his wrist tight. "On no account, Laugnac. You forget all the windows of the chateau see us. The rest of his creatures would escape, and I must have not a few of them in prison. No! we will be tender with him. He shall be our sweet cousin of Guise, our well-beloved counselor and friend. Greet him gracefully as you pass by him, and tell the page to seek, high and low, for Villequier, and bring him to me."

Laugnac bowed low and walked away, and, as he went, he left the Duke of Guise the whole of the path, pulling off his hat till the plumes almost swept the ground, but without speaking. Guise bowed to him graciously; but, evidently in haste, passed on towards the king, whom he saluted with every demonstration of respect, and on

whom, in return, Henry smiled with the most gracious expression that he could assume.

"What seeks our fair cousin of Guise?" said the king. "I know this is a busy hour with him in general, and, therefore, judge that it must be matter of some importance brings him now."

"Not exactly so, sire," replied the duke. "There is but little business of importance stirring now, when so many of the multitude, lately collected in Blois, have returned to their own homes for the approaching festival. I came, however, to beseech your majesty to grant me permission to absent myself for a few days on the same joyful occasion. All business for the time ceasing, my presence will not be necessary."

"Assuredly, assuredly!" replied Henry, turning pale at the very idea of the duke's escaping from his hands. "But do you go soon, fair cousin! I thought that you proposed the marriage of your fair ward for to-morrow; indeed, I heard that everything was prepared, and I myself intended to be one of the guests."

"We have not forgotten your majesty's gracious promise," replied the duke. "Everything is prepared, and half an hour before high mass we shall all be waiting for your majesty in the revestiery of the chapel. Never yet have I seen two young beings so happy in their mutual love; and as we have broken through some cold forms, in consideration of the many services which the lover has rendered to his future bride, they are always together, and clinging to each other as if they fancied that something would yet separate them."

Henry smiled, but there was a certain mixture in it which rendered it difficult to say whether the expression was gracious or ironical. "Well, then, good cousin," he said, "as you have mighty business toward, we had better hold our council as early as possible to-morrow, and not wait till the usual hour. Let it be as near day-break as possible. The god of day does not open his eyes too soon at this season of the year. And yet I fear that the business of various kinds that we have before us will occupy more time than one council can afford. Thus we may be obliged to detain you at Blois, fair cousin, longer than you expect, I fear."

"I did not intend to go, sire," replied the duke, "till somewhere about twelve on Christmas-day, which would give me the opportunity of being present at two

councils ; and I shall be also absent so short a space of time—certainly not longer than three whole days—that the interruption will not be great.”

“Well, be it so, be it so,” replied the king. “We know that your activity makes rapidly up for time lost. As to the marriage, I will sign the contract in the vestry, where I meet you ; and I think that, notwithstanding the poverty of my treasury, I have a jewel yet of some price to give the bride.”

“I beseech your majesty, think not of it,” replied the Duke of Guise. “She and her good husband will be equally devoted to your service without such a mark of your condescension.”

After a few more words of the same kind the duke took leave, and Henry remained in the garden walking to and fro, and growing every moment more and more impatient for the arrival of Villequier.

“Where can he be ?” he muttered to himself. “He promised to be back before nine o’clock this morning. What can detain him ? By Heavens ! he will lose the best part of our enterprise if he stays. Can he have met with some mishap by the way ? or has some lady poisoned him with champignons or with Cyprus wine ? or tried cold steel upon him ? or shot him with a silver bullet in honour of his great master ? No steel would touch him, I should think, if all tales were true. But here he comes, here he comes, alive and well, with the eye of a wolf and the footfall of a cat. He is a handsome animal notwithstanding, even now, if he would but paint his lips a little, for they are too pale. Something has gone wrong. He seems agitated ; and to see Villequier moved by anything is indeed a wonder. Why, how now, dear friend ? What is it that affects you ? I declare your lip quivers, and your cheek is red. What is the meaning of this ?”

“Why, sire,” replied Villequier, “I just met the Duke of Guise in the hall of the chateau, and he not only tells me that the marriage of his niece goes forward, but that your majesty has promised to sign the contract, and to be present at the ceremony. How you intend to withdraw yourself, I do not know ; but to throw, at least, some obstacle in the way, I said that my signature had not been asked ; and, while my application was before the Parliament of Paris, the marriage could not take place without that signature. He answered haughtily,

sire, not by requesting, but by commanding me to be in the revestiery of the chapel at the hour of half past eleven; and he added, with a significant tone, that he would teach me the use of pen and ink."

Henry showed no wrath: his mind was made up to his proceedings; his dark determination taken; and, utterly remorseless himself, he sported in his own imagination with the idea of Guise's death, and only smiled at his conduct to Villequier, as the skilful angler sees amused the large trout dash at the gilded fly, knowing that a moment after he will have the tyrant of the stream upon his own hook, and panting on the bank.

"You shall be in the revestiery, Villequier," said the king; "you shall sign the marriage contract, for the king commands you as well as the Duke of Guise; and surely two such potent voices must be obeyed."

Villequier paused for a minute or two ere he replied; calculating what might be the king's motives in his present conduct. He knew Henry well, and knew his vacillating, changeable disposition; and he suspected that he was determined to violate his promise to Gaspar de Montsoreau upon some inducement, either of hope or fear, held out to him by the Duke of Guise. He was well aware, however, that if the means taken had been disagreeable, the king, though he might have endured them smilingly in the presence of the duke, would have burst forth into passion, almost frantic, when conversing with him. He therefore replied straightforwardly, "I suppose, sire, the younger brother has outbid the elder."

"Wrong, wrong, good friend," replied the king. "Your hawk has missed its stroke, Villequier. The Duke of Guise wills it so! Is not that quite sufficient in France?"

"I hope it will not be so long, sire," replied Villequier, now beginning, though indistinctly, to catch the king's meaning. "I hope it will not be so long."

"Ha, René! Do you understand me now?" said Henry. "Hark ye! Are you not this girl's guardian beyond all doubt, were the duke out of the way?"

"Indubitably," answered Villequier; "for the only thing that affects my right, even now, is her father's will, appointing this same Henry, duke of Guise, to be her guardian; the other brothers are not named."

"Well, then," said Henry, "have a contract of mar-

riage, in due and proper form, drawn out this very night, in the names of Marie de Clairvaut and Gaspar, marquis of Montsoreau. Be in the revestry at the hour named, and bring with you your gay bridegrooms, with all his golden crowns. You shall sign the contract, and I will sign the contract, and we will find means, I think, to make the fair lady sign the contract too, while the Duke of Guise's bridegroom discovers his way into a dungeon of the chateau. You have been so long absent, I feared you would not come in time to hear all this."

"Why, sire," replied Villequier, "I was forced to be absent; for, although your majesty seems to have forgotten a certain paper given to the Abbé de Boisguerin, I have not."

"Ha!" said the king, "I had forgotten indeed. We must suppress that, Villequier; we must suppress that, if he will not consent to our plans; which, I see by your face, it is not your opinion that the worthy abbé will do. You must get it from him and suppress it."

Villequier smiled at the very thought. "He will never give it up to be suppressed, sire," replied the marquis. "Your majesty little knows the man."

"Well, then, suppress him!" said the king, with a laugh; "suppress him, Villequier, and the paper with him. Under the great blaze made by this business of the Guise, his affair will be but as one of the wax tapers that a country girl with sore eyes buys for half a denier, to hang up before St. Radigonde. Suppress him, Villequier; suppress him. I know no one so capable of sweeping the window clear of such flies."

"Yes, sire," replied Villequier; "but he is a wasp, not a fly. He has his antidotes for poison, and sureties against the knife. He has, besides, more powerful friends, it seems, than any of us believed, or, at least, more powerful means of gaining them. The pope has been induced to set him free of his vows. I find, too, that Epernon sent for him immediately after that business of the attempt upon his life at Angoulême, and they are now sworn friends and comrades, levying forces together, holding counsel every other hour; and here is the former abbé now disporting himself as Seigneur de Boisguerin; and, just like a butterfly that has cast its slough, he arrives in Blois last night in gilded apparel, with a train of twenty horse behind him, and a number of sumpter mules. I saw him in his gay attire near An-

goulême, and find that he aspires to the hand of the fair heiress himself."

"But what is to be done, Villequier?" said the king, smiling. "It seems to me that all the world are seeking her. Suppose we send for an auctioneer, and set her up *aux enchères*. But, to speak seriously, what will you do with this *ci-devant abbé*?"

"I have done with him something already," replied Villequier, "that, with all his art, he could not prevent or know. I found this young Marquis of Montsoreau somewhat stubborn to counsel. He loved not the plan of coming and lying concealed at Blois. Though he is politic and artful at seasons himself, yet now he was all passion and fury. Nothing would serve him but he must come to Blois in open day, with a hundred lances at his back. He would fight his brother, it seemed, and cut his throat. He would beard the Guise; and he would compel your majesty and me to fulfil our promise to the letter. That the girl had escaped he attributed to my connivance; and, by Heavens! I almost feared he would have laid violent hands upon me. In short, sire, by a little skilful teasing, I found that this same Abbé de Boisguerin, whose credit I had once greatly shaken, had resumed the mastery, and was urging on his former pupil to every sort of rash and violent act, probably with the hope of getting him killed out of his way. I soothed the good youth down, however, and told him I would give him proof of his friend's regard. I hid him where he could hear all that passed, and then entrapped the abbé into talking of the paper that we had signed for him. I told him that the person for whom your majesty and I destined this fair Helen was the young Marquis of Montsoreau. I reminded him that he had obtained that paper with an absolute and direct view to that marriage; at least, that he had told me so; and I asked him immediately to sign his consent to the alliance. Your majesty may imagine his answers; and the youth's rage was such that most assuredly he would have broken in upon us, if I had not stationed two men to stop him. However, he became afterward as docile as a lamb; was convinced, by what passed, that we had throughout been dealing sincerely with him, and will be ready at the hour to-morrow. When the good abbé, perhaps, hears that the whole affair is concluded; that Guise is gone, and your majesty powerful, he may judge it more

wise to be silent and resigned. We can tempt him, first, with some post ; we can alarm him, if that will not do, with some peril ; and, lastly, if we fail in both, then we must find some way of putting an end to the matter altogether."

"That will be easily done," replied the king, his mind reverting to the Duke of Guise. "But come, Villequier, let us go and consult with Laugnac. I told him, before you came, to seek for you and consult with you. We must trust as few as possible in this business, and I must see to the whole myself, for this is a step on which, if we but slip, we fall to inevitable perdition."

CHAPTER XIX.

Was the Duke of Guise unconscious of the dangers that surrounded him? Was he unaware that the power which he assumed, and the power which the States also put upon him, could not but render him obnoxious in the highest degree to the king, who, though weak and indolent, was jealous of that authority which he failed himself to exercise for the benefit of his people? Was the duke ignorant that the monarch was as treacherous as feeble, was as remorseless as vicious? Was it unknown to him, that to all the creatures who surrounded the king, he was an object of hatred and jealousy; and that there were ready hands and base hearts enough to attempt anything which the royal authority might warrant?

He was not so ignorant or so unaware: he had been warned sufficiently, days and weeks before; but, even had that not been the case, on that very night he received sufficient intimations of his danger to put him on his guard.

He had presided at the supper-table as grand master of the king's household, and he had received his guests with easy courtesy. The meal was over somewhat sooner than usual; and the business of the State being considerably slackened, in consequence of the approaching festival of Christmas, he sat in his cabinet with Charles of Montmoreau and Marie de Clairvant only,

enjoying an hour of refreshment in calm and tranquil conversation upon subjects which, however agitating to them, was merely a matter of pleasant interest to him.

Charles of Montsoreau sat by his side, making some notes of various little things that the duke told him, and Marie de Clairvaut was seated on a stool at his feet, while he looked down upon her from time to time with the sort of parental tenderness which he had displayed towards her from her infancy. *with a look on his face*

A pleasing sort of melancholy had come over him; a sadness without grief, and mingling even occasionally with gayety. It was that sort of present consciousness of the emptiness of all worldly things, which every man at some moment feels, even the ambitious, the greedy, the zealous, the passionate. Perhaps that which had brought such a mood upon him was the contrast of all the arrangements for his ward's marriage, and the deep and intense feelings which that event excited in the bosom of herself and Charles of Montsoreau, with the eager and fiery struggles in which he had been lately taking part, while engaged in the dark, fierce strife of ambition, or tossed in the turbid whirlpool of political intrigue. And thus he sat, and thus he talked with them of their future prospects and their coming happiness, sometimes speaking seriously, nay, gravely; sometimes jesting lightly, and smiling when he made Marie cast down her eyes.

As he thus sat there was a tap at the door of his cabinet, and the duke, knowing it to be the page, bade him enter; when the boy Ignati appearing, informed him that the Count de Schomberg was without.

"Bid him come in," replied the duke, keeping his seat, and making a sign for his companions not to stir. "Welcome, Schomberg," he said; "you see that I am plotting no treason here. What do you think of my two children? Joinville will be jealous of my eldest son. But, jesting apart, I think you know the Count de Logères. My niece, Marie, I know you have had many a time upon your knee in her infancy."

Schomberg bowed to each, but gravely; and replied to the duke, who held out his hand to him, "My dear duke, I wish everybody were as well persuaded that you are plotting no treason as I am. But I come to speak to your highness upon a matter of business. I have a warning to give you," he added, in a whisper,

"Oh! speak it aloud, speak it aloud," replied the duke. "If it concerns myself, you may well speak it before these two."

"Indeed!" said Schomberg, apparently hesitating, and running his eyes over the tapestry, as if calculating how he had best proceed. "My good lord duke," he said at length, "I believe you know that there are few who love you better than myself, though I neither am nor affect to be a zealot, but rather what your people call one of the Politics."

"I know, Schomberg, what you mean," said the duke; "you are my friend, but not my partisan. I can make the distinction, Schomberg, and love the friend no less. What have you to say?"

"Why this, my lord," replied Schomberg. "Look up above the door there, just before your eyes. Do you see how beautifully they have carved in the black oak the figure of a porcupine, and how all the sharp and prickly quills stick out, ready to wound the hand that touches it?"

"Yes, I see," replied the duke. "But do you know the history of that porcupine, Schomberg?"

"Yes," answered the count, "I know it well, my Lord of Guise. Both in the stonework and the woodwork of this castle there are many such. They were placed there, I think, my lord—am I not right!—by an old monarch of France, as a sort of device, to signify that whoever grasps royalty too rudely will suffer injury in consequence."

The duke smiled in the same placid mood as before; but replied, "In the next chamber, Schomberg, which is my bedchamber, you may see the device of Francis the First too; a salamander unhurt in the midst of flames; which may be interpreted to mean, that strong courage is never more at ease than in the midst of perils."

A grave smile came over the face of Schomberg, to find the figures in which he involved his warning so easily retorted by the Duke of Guise. "I have heard of your highness," he said, without noticing the duke's reply, "that not very many years ago you were known to swim against the stream of the Loire armed at all points. You are a strong man, my lord duke; but there are other streams you cannot swim against, depend upon it."

"Then I will try to go with the current, Schomberg," replied the duke. "As long as that is with me, it will bear me up."

"But it may dash you against a rock, duke," replied Schomberg; "and I see one straight before you."

He spoke sternly and impressively, and Guise listened to him with more attention. "Speak, Schomberg," he said, "speak; you may speak clearly before them. But sit, good friend; pray thee sit. Standing there before me, with your sad aspect and warning voice, you look like a spectre."

"Well, my lord," said Schomberg, seating himself, "I have certain information that there are evil designs against you, ripe, or almost ripe, for execution. Your life is in danger, Guise; I tell you truly, I tell you sincerely, and I beseech you to hear me. Your life is in danger, and you have no time to lose if you would place it in safety."

"Why, what would you have me to do, Schomberg?" said the duke, in a tone not exactly indifferent, but still showing no great interest in the subject.

"I would have you mount your horse this night," replied Schomberg, "or at daybreak to-morrow. I would have you gather your train together, take these two young people with you, and, retiring to Paris, inform the king that you had proof your life was not safe at Blois."

The Duke of Guise meditated for a moment, and then replied, "Schomberg, I cannot grasp this fear. Brought up to arms from my youth, cradled in the tented field, with death surrounding me at every hour of life, I cannot feel as other men might feel in moments of peril to myself. Neither will I ever have it said of me that I willingly fled from my post under the apprehension of any personal danger."

"By our old friendship, Guise," replied Schomberg, "by our companionship in the fields of other days, I beseech you to consider and to judge wisely. Remember, if the vengeance of a monarch, or the instigation of villanous courtiers, were to have success, and you were to fall beneath the blow of an assassin, what would become of your children, all yet in their youth? what would become of your relations and your friends, placed, as you have placed them, on a high pinnacle, to be aimed at by a crowd of idle minions with their bird-bolts? What would become of your son?"

"Joinville must make his own fame," replied the duke, "and guard his own rights with his own sword. I was left earlier than he is without a parent's care; with a

host of enemies around me; with my father's name, giving me a heritage of envy and hatred; and with no support but my own sword. With that sword I have bowed those enemies to the dust, and Joinville must show himself worthy to bear it too."

He paused and meditated for a moment or two, and then added, "After all, Schomberg, I do not see that there can be much danger. Here, in the castle, I am as strong or stronger than the king. When I go forth, I am so well accompanied that it would be difficult to surprise me if they attacked me with numbers. A single assassin might dog my steps, it is true; but I do not know that man upon the face of the earth, who, hand to hand with me, would not have more than an equal share of fear and danger. However, I will think of what you have said, and will take good care to be more upon my guard than ever. At the same time, Schomberg, I thank you most sincerely, and look upon your regard as one of the best possessions that I have."

"Guise," said Schomberg, rising and approaching the door, "I have failed with you. But I yield not my point yet. I will send those to you who may have more influence."

"Stay, Schomberg, stay!" cried the duke; but his friend passed through the door and would not return.

Charles of Montsoreau then raised his voice in the same cause as Schomberg, and Marie de Clairvaut entreated anxiously that he would yield to what had been proposed. But at them the duke only laughed.

"Hush, hush!" he said. "Logères, you do not know what you say. There, kiss her and be gone. To-morrow she shall be yours, no more to part. Say no more, silly girl; say no more. You, a child of a Guise, talk to me of fear! Call thy maidens, get thee to thy bed, and rise to-morrow with bright eyes and blooming cheeks. Fare thee well, sweet one. I long to be quit of thy guardianship."

Remonstrance was useless, and they parted; and the Duke of Guise, sitting down for a moment, gave himself up to thought. His eyes were fixed upon the dark tapestry opposite, where was depicted a woody scene, the particulars of which could not be well distinguished by the dim light of the lamp.

After he had gazed for a moment or two, however, his eyes assumed a peculiar expression, a fixed, intense,
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and somewhat bewildered stare. He passed his hand twice before them, as if he felt them dim or dazzled; then clasped his hands together and gazed, still muttering to himself, "Strange, very strange! It is there still!" And, starting up from the table, he seized the lamp, and advanced directly towards the side of the room on which his eyes had been fixed, still gazing steadfastly on the same spot. At length, as he approached close to the wall, his features relaxed, and he said with a smile, "It is gone! These delusions of the sight are wonderful!"

He had not yet returned to his seat, when the door on his right hand opened gently, and the form of a woman glided in. It was that of the beautiful being with whom he had parted in some anger at the king's ball, and she gazed at him, evidently surprised to see him standing with the lamp in his hand close to the wall, on a side where there was no exit.

"In the name of Heaven, Guise! what is the matter!" she said. "I heard you speaking as I came in. You are pale; your lip quivers!"

"It is nothing; it is nothing," replied the duke, putting down the lamp and taking her hand. "This is, indeed, dear and kind of you, Charlotte. I trusted, I was sure, that your anger for a light offence would not last long."

"It would have lasted long, Guise," she said, "or, at least, its effects would not have passed away, had it not been for the warning that I have received concerning you. Guise, you would not have seen me now—you would never have seen me in these rooms again—"

"Nay, nay," interrupted the duke, "traverse not so your own nature. Say not that a few unthinking words would render her so harsh who is so gentle."

"They were not unthinking words, Henry of Guise," replied the lady. "They were words of deep meaning, to be read and understood at once. Think you that I could misunderstand them? Think you that I could not read that Guise would not suffer the pure to dwell with the impure? However," she added, quickly, seeing that the duke was going to interrupt her, "let me speak of other things. I was about to say that you would not have seen me this night, you would never have seen me in these chambers again, had I not learned that your life was in danger; and then my fears for you showed me that my love was unchanged, and I

came at all risks to warn you, and to beseech you to be gone."

"Nay, nay," replied the duke. "How can I be gone when you are here, Charlotte! And, besides, there is no real danger. It is Schomberg has frightened you, I know. He came here with the same tale; but I showed him there was no danger."

"It was not from Schomberg!" said Madame de Noirmoutier, vehemently. "I have never seen Schomberg since I have been here. It was from the queen; it was from Catharine herself that I heard it. She told me to tell you; she told me to warn you. Her son, she said, had not divulged to her his scheme; but, from her knowledge of the man, and from the words he used, she was certain that he would attempt your life within three days."

"Then his attempt will fail, dear Charlotte," said the duke, holding her hand tenderly in his. "Fear not for me; I am fully upon my guard; and in this chateau and this town am stronger than the king himself."

"Oh, Guise, Guise, you are deceiving yourself," she said, bursting into tears. "Twice I have been at your door this night, but the page told me there was some one with you; and now I have come, determined not to leave you till I see you making preparations to depart. Let me entreat you, let me beseech you," she continued, as Guise wiped away her tears. "Nay, Guise, nay; in this I will take no refusal. If not for your own sake, for my love you shall fly. You shall treat me ill, as you did before, again and again. You shall make a servant of me, a slave. You will not surely refuse me when you see me kneeling at your feet." And she sunk upon her knees before him, and clasped her fair hands in entreaty. The duke was raising her tenderly, when the page's knock was heard at the door; and, before he could well give the command to enter, the boy was in the room.

"My lord," he said, "there is Monsieur Chapelle Marteau and several other gentlemen, desiring earnestly to speak with you."

Madame de Noirmoutier looked wildly round the room, and seemed about to pass through the door by which the page had entered. "Be not alarmed," said the duke; "you cannot pass there, Charlotte. These men will not be with me above a few minutes. Pass

into that room, and wait till they are gone. I have a thousand things to say to you, and will dismiss them soon."

After a moment's hesitation, she did as he directed, and, turning to the page, the duke bade him admit the party who were waiting without. It consisted of Chappelle Marteau, the President de Neuilli, a gentleman of the name of Mandreville, the duke's brother the Cardinal de Guise, and the Archbishop of Lyons.

The duke received them with that winning grace for which he was famous, and soon learned from them that their visit was owing to the information received from the Count de Schomberg. Every one then present but the Archbishop of Lyons urged him strongly to quit Blois immediately. They had come in a body, they said, in hopes that their remonstrances might have the greater effect. Each had heard in the course of the evening those rumours which generally announce great events: some had been told that the duke was arrested; some that he had been absolutely assassinated in the gardens of the chateau; and some that the act was to be performed that night by a number of soldiers, who had been privately introduced into the castle.

Guise listened silently and with great attention, displaying in demeanour every sort of deference and respect for the opinions of those who showed such an interest in his fate. He replied, however, that he trusted and hoped that both the rumours they had heard and the intelligence given by Schomberg originated in nothing but mistaken words, or in those idle and unfounded reports which always multiply themselves in moments of great political agitation and excitement. Besides this, he said, even if the king were disposed to attempt his life, the execution of such an act would be very difficult, if not impossible; and that, considering before all things his duty to his country, the very fact of the king seeking such a thing ought to be the strongest reason for his stay, inasmuch as the monarch's animosity could only be excited towards him out of enmity to the Catholic Church, and a disposition to repress and tyrannize over the States.

"If such be his feelings," continued the duke, "we must consider ourselves as two armies in presence of each other, and the one that retreats, of course, awards the victory to his adversary."

The Archbishop of Lyons, perhaps, was the person who decided the fate of the Duke of Guise; for, had the party which came to him been unanimous and urgent in their remonstrance, there is a probability that he would have yielded; but the archbishop seemed doubtful and undecided. He said that he thought, indeed, it might be well the duke should go, at least for a time. But they had to consider, also, the probabilities of the king making any attempt upon the duke. Though weak, timid, and indolent, Henry was shrewd and far-seeing, he said. The only result that could follow an attempt upon a person so beloved by the whole nation, and especially by the States, as the Duke of Guise, would be to arm the people of France in an instant against the sovereign authority. This the king must well know, he continued; and that consideration made him less eager upon the subject, though he thought it might be as well that his highness should retire for a time.

His speech more than counterbalanced the exhortations of all the rest; and from that moment the resolution of the duke became immovable. His dauntless mind, which might have yielded had he stood absolutely alone in opinion, came instantly to the conclusion, that if there was a single individual who doubted whether he should fly or not, he himself ought to decide upon remaining. He made no answer to the archbishop's speech, but suffered Mandreville to combat his arguments without interruption. That gentleman replied that Henry, far from being the person represented, though cunning, was anything but prudent. Had they ever seen, he demanded, the cunning of the king, even in the least degree, restrain or control him? Had the self-evident risk of his throne, of his life, and of the welfare of his people, ever made him pause in the commission of one frantic, vicious, or criminal act? He was no better, the deputy said, than a cunning madman, such as was frequently seen, who, having determined upon any act, however absurd or evil might be the consequences, even to the destruction of his own self, would arrive at it by some means, and go directly to his purpose in despite of all obstacles. He contended that he had good reason to know that the king devised evil against the duke; and they might depend upon it that no consideration of policy, right, or religion, would prevent him from executing his purpose by some means.

He spoke truly, and with more thorough insight into the character of the king than any one previously had done ; but the resolution of the Duke of Guise, as we have said before, was already taken.

"My good friends," he said in conclusion, "I thank you most sincerely, and I shall ever feel grateful for the interest that you have taken in me, and for your anxiety regarding me on the present occasion. But my resolution is taken, and must be unalterable. I cannot but acknowledge that the view of Monsieur de Mandreville may have much truth in it ; but, nevertheless, matters are now at such a point, that, if I were to see death coming in at that window, I would not seek the door."

Against a determination so forcibly expressed, there was, of course, no possibility of holding farther argument ; and, after a word or two more on different subjects of less interest—the Duke of Guise replying as briefly as possible to everything that was said—the party took their leave and retired.

CHAPTER XX.

THERE was at that time a large open space round the church of St. Sauveur, in Blois, where the people from the country used occasionally to exhibit their fruits and flowers for sale ; and exactly opposite the great door of the church stood a large and splendid mansion, with an internal courtyard, part of which had been let to some of the deputies for the States-General. The principal floor, however, consisting of sixteen rooms, and several large passages and corridors, had been left untenanted, in consequence of the proprietor asking an exorbitant rent, till two or three days before the period of which we speak. Then, however, the apartment was taken suddenly ; a number of attendants, in new and splendid dresses, appeared therein ; and, as we have seen from the account of Villequier to the king, the Abbé de Boisguerin arrived in Blois, with a splendid train of attendants, and took up his abode as the master of that dwelling.

About the same time that the conversations which we

have detailed in the last chapter were going on in the cabinet of the Duke of Guise, the abbé was seated in one of the rooms, which he had fixed upon for his own peculiar saloon. It was very customary in those days, and in France, for every chamber, except a great hall of reception, to be used also as a bedroom. But that was not the case in this instance; for the chamber, which was small, though very lofty, had been used by the former occupants as a cabinet, and had been chosen by the abbé probably on account of its being so completely detached from every other chamber, that no sound of what was done or said therein could be overheard by any one.

He sat in a large armchair, with his feet towards the fire, and with his right elbow resting on a table covered with various sorts of delicacies. Those delicacies, however, were not the productions of the land in which he then lived, but rather such as he had been accustomed to in other days, and which recalled former habits of life. There were fine dried fruits from the Levant, tunny and other fish from the Mediterranean; and the wines, though inferior to those of France, were from foreign vineyards.

Before him was standing a man whom we have had occasion to mention more than once; that Italian vagabond named Orbi, from whom, it may be remembered, Charles of Montsoreau delivered the boy Ignati. He was now dressed in a very different guise, however, from that which he had borne while wandering as a mere stroller from house to house. His shaggy black hair was trimmed and smooth; his beard was partially shaved and reduced to fair proportions, with a sleek mustache, well turned and oiled, gracing his upper lip; his face, too, was clean; and a suit somewhat sombre in colour, but of good materials, displaying in the ruff and at the sleeves a great quantity of fine white linen and rich lace, left scarcely a vestige of the fierce Italian vagabond, half bravo, half minstrel, which he had appeared not a year before.

The conversation which was going on between him and the master he now served was evidently one of great interest. The abbé's wine remained half finished in the glass; the preserved fruits upon his plate were scarcely tasted; and he exclaimed, "So, so! Villequier sends me no answer to my letter! A bare message, by word of mouth, that the Duke of Guise wills it to be so;

and that the duke's will is all powerful at the court of France! The king sets at naught his own royal word, does he?"

"He said something, sir," said the Italian, "about his knowing, and the king also, that they must pay a penalty; but that no sum was to be grudged rather than offend the duke at this time."

"Sum!" cried the Abbé de Boisguerin, starting up and pushing the chair vehemently from him. "What is any sum to me?" And with flashing eyes and a countenance all inflamed, he strode up and down the chamber for a moment or two, with his heart swelling with bitterness and disappointed passion. "A curse upon this bungling hand," he cried, striking it upon the table, "that it should fail me at such a moment as that! I thought the young viper had been swept from my way for ever! My aim was steady and true, too! His heart must be in some other place than other men's."

"Ha! my lord," joined in the Italian, in the tone of a connoisseur, "the arquebus is a pretty weapon, I dare say, in a general battle, but it is desperate uncertain in private affairs like that. You can never tell, to an inch or two, where the ball will hit. But, with a dagger, you can make sure to a button-hole; and even if there should be a struggle, it is always quite easy so to salve the point of your blade, that you make sure of your friend, even if you give him-but a scratch. Now the attempt to poison a ball is all nonsense, for the fire destroys the venom."

"At what hour said you, Orbi?" demanded the abbé, without attending to his dissertations.

"Half an hour before high mass," replied the man, "the marriage is to take place."

Again the Abbé de Boisguerin burst into a vehement fit of passion, and strode up and down the room, cursing and blaspheming, till accidentally his eyes fell upon a small Venetian mirror, and the aspect of his own countenance, ordinarily so calm and unmoved, now distorted by rage and disappointment, made him start. A smile of scorn, even at himself, curled his lip; and, calming his countenance by a great effort, he again seated himself and mused for a moment.

"This must not and shall not be," he said at length. "Orbi, you are an experienced hand, and doubtless dexterous. Will you stop this going forward?"

The man smiled, stroked back his mustaches, and replied, "I thought you would be obliged to take my way at last. Well, monseigneur, I have no objection; but the time is short. I told you what I expected for such an affair when I offered to do it in Paris."

"You shall have it! you shall have it!" replied the abbé. "But if you do it so that no suspicion ever falls on me, you shall have as much again this day two years; for nothing but the lives of these two young men stands between me and immense wealth."

"The worst of it all is," said the Italian, "that there is so short a time. It is to take place in the castle chapel: so there will be no going through the streets. To find him alone will be a matter of difficulty: and though I went over the passages, thinking it might come to this, yet I saw no one place, but at the door of the room called the revestry, where one could strike easily."

"I have seen the place," said the abbé, "long ago; but I do not remember it so perfectly as to give you any aid. I know that the window of the room you mention looks into the court and gardens, and under the garden wall shall be a swift horse to bear you away. That is all I can do for you."

"I must do the rest for myself," replied the man, "and will find some means, depend upon it. Perhaps he may not wait for the other if he be eager, but may come first by himself, and then it will be easily done. However, I will now go and get the dagger ready, and I can undertake that the least scratch shall not leave an hour's life in him."

The Abbé de Boisguerin nodded his head and smiled as the other departed. "They know not," he said to himself, "they know not the man they have to deal with. These mighty men, these haughty Guises, may find that every man of strong determination and unflinching courage may thwart if he cannot master them; may destroy their plans if he cannot accomplish his own. But there is another still to be dealt with. There is this proud, unfeeling, contemptuous girl; she who has been rejoicing in the reappearance of this crafty fair-faced boy. There is now no going back; and why should I not risk life to win her too, and gratify both my love and my revenge! Yet that seems scarcely possible," he continued. "Closely watched within the castle, never going out but strongly accompanied, she is put, it would

seem, entirely out of my power, now that Villequier has fallen off from me. And yet," he continued, meditating, "and yet there is nothing impossible to the dauntless and the daring. Could I not bring her to the postern gate of the garden an hour before this marriage is to take place, and then, with swift horses and a carriage ready, convey her once more far away! We have done as bold and difficult a feat before; and methinks, if I could tell her that I have news to give her concerning her uncle's safety—for rumours of his danger must have reached her ears—she will not fail to come, and come alone. Oh! if I once more get her in my power, she shall find no means to fly again, till, on the contrary, she shall be more inclined to kneel at my feet and beseech that I would wed her. So it shall be; I will write to her that, if at ten o'clock she will be alone at the postern gate of the castle, she will hear news that may save her uncle's life. Then, with the swiftest horses we can find, a few hours will take us far from pursuit! I will carry her into Spain! Epernon is with me, and the way open! It shall be done!" he said aloud; "it shall be done! But, then, this boy's death is scarcely needful! Why should I mind his living? It will be but the greater torture to him to know that she is mine! And yet, it were better he should die. All the tidings, and the rumours, and the bustle of his violent death in the castle will too much occupy the minds of men to let them notice our flight; so that we shall gain an hour or two. There is an eager and a daring spirit, also, within him—a keen and active mind—which might frustrate me once more in the very moment of hope. He must die! I have set my life upon the chance; and what matters it whether one or two others are swept away before me? He must die! and then, without protection, she is mine. Once into Tourraine, and I am safe! Ha! you are back again quickly, my good friend Orbi. Is all ready?"

"Everything, sir," replied the man; "and if I could but get into the chateau, and stumble upon the youth alone, I might be able to accomplish the matter to-night. Could you not furnish me with a billet to this Villequier or some one? It matters not what; any empty words, just to make them admit me at the gates."

"Not to Villequier," said the abbé; "not to Villequier. But I will write a few words to Mademoiselle de Clairvaux herself."

"That will do well! that will do well!" replied the man. "I am more likely to find him hanging about her apartments than anywhere else; and then one slight blow does the deed."

"Bring me paper and pens from the next room," cried the abbé. "It shall be done this moment." And, as soon as the implements for writing were procured, he wrote a subtle epistle to Marie de Clairvaut, beseeching her to speak for a moment, at the postern gate of the chateau gardens, early on the following day, to a person who would communicate something to her which might save the life of her guardian, the Duke of Guise. It was written in a feigned hand, and under the character of an utter stranger to her. Some mistakes, too, were made in the orthography of her name, and in regard to other circumstances, for the purpose of rendering the deception complete. When this was concluded and sealed, he placed it in the hands of Orbi, and, after a few more words, they parted.

While the abbé busied himself in causing a carriage to be bought for the proposed enterprise of the following day, and in ordering the swiftest horses that could be found to be obtained—not from the royal post, by which his course might have been tracked, but from one of the keepers of *relais*, as the irregular posting houses were called which were then tolerated in France—the Italian proceeded on his task with feelings in his heart which might well have been received as a reason for abating the price of the deed he was about to perform.

To tell the truth, it might be considered fully as much his own act as that of the abbé, for the same malevolent feelings were in the hearts of each; and he went not there merely as the common hired assassin, to do the work of his trade as a matter of course, but he went also to avenge a long-remembered blow, which still rankled in his heart with the same bitterness that he had felt at the moment it was received.

He met with some difficulty in obtaining entrance to the chateau at so late an hour of the night; but the letter addressed to Mademoiselle de Clairvaut enabled him to effect that object at length, and he was directed towards the suite of apartments assigned to the Duke of Guise and his family. When he had once passed the first two gates, he met with no obstruction, but wander-

ed through the long, dimly-lighted corridors, scarcely encountering a waking being on his way, and certainly none who seemed inclined to speak to him.

When he had reached that part of the building to which he had been directed, he looked round for some one to give him farther information, not absolutely intending to seek the apartments of Mademoiselle de Clairvaut and deliver the note, but merely to obtain a general knowledge of how the different chambers were allotted. After passing on some way, without meeting any one or hearing a sound, he saw a door half open, with the light streaming out, and, quietly approaching, he looked in.

There was a boy in the dress of a page, sitting before a large Christmas fire reading a book; but, though he walked stealthily, the first step which the Italian took in the room caught the youth's quick ear, and, starting up, he showed the Italian the face of his former bondman, Ignatus Marone. The man started when he saw him; but, recovering himself instantly, he went up and endeavoured to sooth the boy with fair and flattering words.

"Ah, my little Ignati," he said, "here thou art, then, and, doubtless, well off with this young lord of thine."

"I *am* well off, Signor Orbi," was the boy's brief reply; and seeing that the man paused and kept gazing round him, the boy added, "But what is your business here?"

"I am only looking about me," replied the man, in somewhat of a contemptuous tone, which he could not smother, although it was his full intention to cajole the boy into giving him all the information he wanted, and perhaps even to induce him unconsciously to aid his purpose.

"Come, come, Signor Orbi," replied the boy, "I know you well, remember; and I know that, though you have changed your doublet, you cannot have changed what is within it. If you do not say immediately what you want, I will call those who will make you." And he approached one of the other doors which the room displayed, and raised his hand towards the latch.

"Hist, hist, Ignati!" cried the Italian. "By Heavens! if you do, you shall never hear what I have got to tell you; something that would make your heart beat with joy if you knew it."

"And what is that?" said the boy, still standing near the door, and looking at his fellow-countryman with a face of scorn and doubt.

"Come hither, and I will tell you," said the Italian; but the boy shook his head, and Orbi added in a low tone, "You know who your mother was, Ignati; but do you know your father?"

The boy gazed at him bitterly and in silence, without making any farther answer; and the man added, "He is now in Blois."

Ignati instantly sprang forward towards him, exclaiming, "Where? Where? Where can I find him? I have still the letter from my dead mother. I have still all the proofs given me by the Marone. Where is he? where is he?"

"Come, let us sit down by the fire," said the man, "and I will tell thee more;" and, finding the boy now quite willing to do what he wished, the man sat down by the fire with him, calculating the various results of particular lines of conduct open before him, but without suffering any one good principle or feeling to mingle at all with his considerations.

He had spoken the words which had called Ignati to him simply as a matter of impulse, and the first question he asked himself was, whether he should tell the boy more of the truth or not. Various considerations, however, induced him to go on, for he had a little scheme in his head which rendered it expedient for him to embarrass the proceedings of the Abbé de Boisguerin on the following morning, after the deed proposed was done, as much as possible.

"You know, Ignati," he said, "that I always loved you, my good youth."

"You gave me bitter proofs of it," replied Ignati.

"Nay, nay, it was my way," replied the Italian. "If you had been my own son, it would have been the same."

"I dare say," replied Ignati, "you would have murdered your own son almost as readily as you tried to murder me."

"Nay, boy, I tried not to murder thee," rejoined the man. "I was not such a fool; that would never have answered my purpose."

"You did it by halves," said the boy. "But come, Master Orbi, tell me more about this matter you spoke

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of, and tell me, too, what brings you here? Where is my father to be found, if, as you say, he is here?"

"He is to be found," said Orbi, "in the great house by the church of St. Sauveur. I remember him well; for, when your mother fled out of Rome before you were born, and was glad to get what assistance she could, she sent me three times back into the city to speak with the Abbé of Laurans, as he was then called."

"And what is he called now?" exclaimed Ignati, eagerly. "What is he called now?"

"He is called the Abbé de Boisguerin," replied the man, "or the Seigneur de Boisguerin, as it now is."

"Then I have seen him," cried Ignati. "Then I have seen him; and he called her—" But the boy suddenly checked himself. "And now, what is it you want here?" he said.

"No harm, Master Ignati," replied the man, with a look half sneering, half dogged. "You seem as grateful as any one else; and, as soon as you get all you want, you turn upon one. I suppose you are waiting for your young master coming back from some gay revel, for the whole place seems as silent as if everybody were gone to bed but you."

"Oh, no," answered Ignati. "There are six of the duke's men sitting up in the next room; and all I fear is, that the gentlemen who are with the duke himself should come out and find you here."

"Then I suppose your master is with them," said the Italian.

The boy smiled. "My master is with them," he said, "for my master is the Duke of Guise; but if you mean the young count who took me from you, he has been gone to bed an hour ago. Ay, Master Orbi, and has two stout men sleeping across his door. I haven't forgot that he struck you a blow one day, nor you either, it seems."

"You are out there, Sharp-wits," said the Italian "I bear the boy no grudge. I got his money, if he gave me a blow into the bargain; so we are quits."

"I doubt you," muttered Ignati to himself; but the man went on without attending to him, saying, "No, no; what I came for really, if you want to know, was to give a letter to a young lady here, from an old gentleman at the other side of the castle. Here it is! Ma'm-selle de Clairvaut is the name."

"Ay, she is gone to bed long ago too," replied the page. "Let me look at the letter."

"It is of no great consequence, I believe," replied the Italian, who fancied the letter a mere pretext. "It is of no great consequence; all about a Persian cat, I believe. So you may take it and give it her to-morrow, if she is gone to bed now. There it is. But how is it you are not with the young count now? The Duke of Guise! Page to the Duke of Guise! Why, that is a step, indeed!"

"Hush!" cried Ignati, hearing the door of the duke's cabinet open behind the arras. "Hush! get you gone with all speed! They are coming out; and if they find you here, I would not answer for your ears, or my own either."

The man started up, and ran out of the door by which he had entered as fast as possible. But he had scarcely made his escape, when the tapestry which covered the doorway into the duke's cabinet was drawn aside, and the Cardinal de Guise, with the Archbishop of Lyons and the rest of the Leaguers, came forth from their conference with the duke.

CHAPTER XXI.

It is now necessary to turn to other apartments in the chateau of Blois: namely, a suite inhabited by the king himself. It comprised—besides several others both above and below—the king's bedroom, into which opened four doors: one communicating with the monarch's private staircase, which we have already spoken of; one to the right, entering into a small dressing-room; one to the left, which gave admittance to a chamber called the old cabinet; and one communicating by a short and narrow passage with the large chamber, which, during the residence of the king at Blois, was employed as a council-room. The walls of the council-room were bare; but those of the king's chamber and the two cabinets were lined throughout with rich old tapestry.

Before five o'clock on the morning of the 23d of December, Henry had risen from his bed and dressed him-

self in haste, and, as soon as his toilet was completed, one of his valets was despatched with all speed to bear a message which already had been intrusted to him. The king then passed out of his dressing-room into his bedchamber, holding a light in his hand, and approached the door which led to the private staircase. There was eagerness and much anxiety in his countenance, and his eyes were fixed upon the top of the stairs with an intense gaze, which seemed to strain them from their orbits.

At length a heavy foot was heard ascending, and then several more, and, in a moment after, the head and shoulders of an armed man, carrying a light, appeared at the mouth of the staircase.

"Ah, Laugnac, this is well!" cried the king, as soon as he saw him. "You are punctual and prepared, I see. Whom have you with you?"

"Nine of my most determined fellows, sire," replied Laugnac. "There is not one, indeed, of the Forty-five that would not shed his life's blood for your majesty. But these gentlemen I know well for men who would kill the devil himself, I believe, if you were to bid them."

As he spoke, half a dozen steps behind him appeared, man after man, nine of the Gascon band called the "Quarant-cinq," in whose countenances might be read that sort of remorseless determination which was suited to the moment and the deed, and whose frames displayed the strength requisite to execute whatever violent act was intrusted to them.

"This is well; this is well," said the king, as they entered. "But where is Larchant, Laugnac?"

"He remained behind, sire," replied the other, "as it will be necessary to secure the doors of the council-chamber. Whenever the enemy has entered, he will come round and join your majesty."

"I should like to have some one with me in the cabinet," said the king. "Run and tell Ornano, Bonnivert, and La Grange to come to me," he continued, speaking to a valet. "Bring them by the back staircase."

The valet went away with a pale countenance, feeling all the agitation which such events might well produce; and while he was gone, the king, after asking Laugnac if he had explained to his companions what was the task in which they were about to be employed, addressed them all in a short speech, not without eloquence and fire.

When he had concluded, he made Laugnac open one of the large chests which formed the window-seats of his bedroom, and taking thence a number of long, sharp, and well-pointed knives, he gave them with his own hands to the assassins, saying, "Here, gentlemen, are the avengers of your liberty and mine! and I command and authorize you to use them for the punishment of the greatest criminal in my kingdom. Every law, divine and human, requires his death; and where power prevents the ordinary course of justice from taking place, it is a right and a privilege of the sovereign to execute judgment by any means that present themselves! Now follow me, gentlemen!" And, leading them on to the other side of the chamber, he posted them himself, the principal part of them in the old cabinet, and the rest behind the arras round the door of the bedroom itself. Most of those even who were in the cabinet were concealed also behind the arras near the entrance, and the door was left open.

By the time this had been arranged, a page had entered the king's bedroom, and now informed him that the gentlemen he had sent for had arrived, adding, "Monsieur de Nambu is there also, sire, saying you told him last night to come at this hour."

"I did, I did," said the king. "Bid them all come up;" and, greeting the others briefly, he took Nambu by the arm, and led him into the passage which conducted to the council-chamber. Through the door which led thither voices were heard speaking beyond.

"Stay there, Nambu," he said in a whisper, "and let no one pass without my especial order. The council cannot have begun its sitting yet, for it is still dark, I see."

"As I passed by I saw into the room," said Nambu, "and there were none but ushers and such people; but I heard that the duke had been sent for, according to the commands your majesty gave last night."

The king then left him and returned into his room, where he found Laugnac and the rest of the gentlemen, whom he led towards the door of his dressing-room.

"I have taken off my headpiece and cuirass, sire," said Laugnac, "as I intend to remain here at the door of your majesty's dressing-room till the matter is settled, and the sight of arms might scare the prey."

"Right, right, Laugnac!" replied the king. "Bid the

page send for Revol by the back staircase. We shall want him to fetch the duke." And, this said, he retired into his cabinet.

The page ran round at once to the door of the council-chamber, where he found Revol just about to enter; and, whispering a word to him, the secretary of state gave the bag of papers to one of the ushers, bidding him hold it till he returned, and followed the king's domestic, forbidding the servants, who had accompanied him thither, to go any farther. The spot where they remained was the large open space at the top of the great staircase, and a number of other persons were there collected, while the company of the king's guard might be seen at the foot of the staircase, not, indeed, under arms, or drawn up in regular order, but waiting apparently for the arrival of some one to give them directions.

After the departure of Revol, the statesmen who had been summoned to the council arrived rapidly one after the other. The Cardinal of Vendôme was among the first, and then followed the Marshals de Retz and D'Aumont. Some other members of the council came next, and then the Archbishop of Lyons. But still neither the Cardinal de Guise nor the duke had made their appearance. Time was now wearing on, and occasionally a page or valet-de-chambre, known to belong to the king, was seen to come and speak with some of the people at the top of the staircase, and then return suddenly.

While this was going on, a boy, bearing the habiliments of a page of the Duke of Guise, passed along at the foot of the staircase; and, seeing a number of archers of the guard collected there, he ran lightly up the steps and mingled with the various persons collected. He passed rapidly along from one to another, as if he was looking for some person, spoke to two or three of those whose faces he knew, and then hurrying away down the stairs, passed with a step of light to the apartments of the Duke of Guise. He found that prince just quitting his cabinet and entering the antechamber. A number of gentlemen and officers followed him, but the boy advanced straight towards him with a degree of familiarity, neither insolent nor ungraceful, and, kissing his hand, said, with his slight Italian accent, "May so humble a being as I am detain your highness for one moment!"

"What is it, Ignati! Speak!" said the Duke of Guise; "I am already late for the council, my good boy."

"Your highness promised to grant me any favour I asked," replied the boy; "and, as the greatest at this moment, I ask to speak with your highness alone."

"What is it?" said the duke, somewhat impatiently, "what is it?" And he drew him a little on one side, motioning the rest to remain.

"My lord," said Ignati, "there is danger going forward, I am sure. All the archers of the guard are at the foot of the staircase; there are many strange faces, not usually seen at the door of the council-chamber. Twice I saw a servant of the king come and speak to Henville, and, hearing you were not arrived, go round again, as if by the back staircase, to the king's apartments. I am sure, sir, there is something wrong."

The duke smiled, but it was somewhat thoughtfully. "Thank you, my good boy," he said. "I know rumours often precede the act; but I cannot pause to consider such things now."

"Oh, sir, think!" the boy ventured to exclaim; "think how the welfare of the state and the welfare of a thousand individuals depend entirely upon your safety. What would become of me! What would become of the young count and his bride, if—"

"Ay, well bethought," replied the duke. "Bring me here paper and the inkhorn;" and, when the boy brought them, Guise bent down over a large coffer that stood near, and wrote a few lines.

"Take that to the count," he said, as soon as he had finished writing. "Quick, Ignati: but, after all, these warnings are but nonsense. There is nobody in France dares do it. Look, I have delayed too long. Here comes a messenger from the king."

"As I find your highness coming," said the usher, approaching the duke, "it is needless, perhaps, to deliver the king's message: but I was directed to say to your highness that the council waited, and that his majesty was extremely anxious that the business of the day should go on, as he wished to proceed to Clery in time for dinner. If your highness were not well, he said, perhaps you would not object to the council being held without you."

"You see!" said the duke, in a low voice, turning towards Ignati with a smile, "you see!" And, follow-

ing the usher, he walked on upon his way towards the council-chamber.

At the bottom of the staircase he found Larchant and the whole body of archers of the guard, who now pressed round him somewhat closely.

"What is it, Larchant! what is it, my good friend!" said the duke. "Your presence here is unusual, I think."

"We are here, your highness," replied Larchant, "to solicit in a body your mediation with the king. You promised me yesterday, my lord, that you would present our petition to his majesty, and advocate our cause in the council. These poor fellows have not received any pay for months; I might almost say, years."

"I did advocate your cause yesterday," said the duke, "and his majesty graciously sent an order upon the treasurer by one of the ushers."

"But the treasurer ungraciously told us, sir, that there was not a sous in his coffers," replied Larchant; and the duke, taking the paper out of his hand, began to mount the stairs, saying, "I will see to it, Larchant; I will see to it."

Larchant and the archers followed him up the steps, still pressing close upon him; and he heard a low deep voice say from the midst of them, "Look to yourself, my lord duke, there are bad men abroad!"

The duke passed on, however, without notice, and entered the hall of the council, the ushers drawing back with low bows as he appeared, and throwing open the doors for him to go in. The moment after those fatal doors had closed behind him, the archers drew up across them at the head of the stairs. Larchant hurried away towards the chamber of the king, and Villequier, passing rapidly by, said in a low voice to one of the attendants, "Go down to Monsieur de Crillon, at the Corps de Garde; tell him to shut and guard the gates, as the duke has gone in."

Though he spoke low, he seemed little to heed who listened to the words; and they were heard by the boy Ignati, who, with the painful conviction that some great evil was about to befall the duke, had followed him step by step to the council-chamber. The boy put his hand to his brow with a look of painful anxiety, and darted away once more towards the apartments of the Duke of Guise. The first person he met with there was Pericard.

the duke's secretary; and, grasping his arm, he exclaimed, "They will murder him! they will murder him! They are closing the gates of the castle and guarding them!"

Pericard rushed to one of the windows that looked out into the court. "Too true, indeed!" he exclaimed. "Too true, indeed! It may be yet time to save him though. Run quick, Ignati, and get one of the duke's handkerchiefs while I write." And with a rapid hand he wrote down, "My lord, your death is resolved. They are barring and guarding the gates. I beseech you come out from the hall of the council to your own apartments. We can make them good against all the world till the town rises to protect you."

Before he had done, the boy was back again with the handkerchief; and, enveloping the note therein, Pericard gave it to him, exclaiming, "Fly, fly with that to the door of the council-chamber, Ignati. The ushers will let you in, surely, to give it to the duke, if you say that he has forgotten his handkerchief."

"They have let me in before," said Ignati, "but I doubt it now. I will try and make my way, at all events."

Again he flew to the top of the staircase, and, as if a matter of course, pushed up towards the door, endeavouring to force his way through the archers.

"Stand back, saucy spright," cried one of the men; "you cannot pass here."

"But I must pass," cried the boy, turning upon him with a fierce air of authority. "I am the Duke of Guise's page, and bring him his handkerchief, which he forgot. Make way, saucy archer, or I will teach you to whom you speak."

"Listen to the insolence of these Guisards," said the man. "But their day is over. Stand back, fool, or I'll knock you down with my partisan."

The boy laid his hand upon his dagger, still striving to push forward; and the man, without farther words, struck him a blow over the head with the staff of his halbert, which laid him prostrate upon the ground. For a moment he seemed stunned; but then, starting up, he turned away and went down the stairs, bursting into tears ere he reached the bottom, not with the pain of the blow he had received, but with the bitter conviction that the last effort had failed, and the fate of Guise was sealed.

In the mean time, the Duke of Guise entered the council-room, carrying in his hand the petition of the guards. Every one rose at his approach; and as the greater part of those present were personally friendly towards him, he went round and spoke to them with his usual grace and suavity, and then laying the petition on the table, approached the fire, saying, "It is awfully cold this morning! Has not his majesty yet appeared?"

"Not yet," replied the Cardinal de Guise, "though we expected him before, for he sent down to hasten our coming. But what is the matter with your highness! there is blood trickling over your mustache."

"The cold has made my nose bleed twice this morning," replied the duke; and, putting his hand in his pocket, he said, "My people have been negligent; they have forgotten to give me a handkerchief. St. Prix," he continued, turning his head to one of the valets-de-chambre, who stood on the inside of the door communicating with the king's apartments, "I wish you would send to my rooms for a handkerchief. You will find some of my people at the door."

"There are plenty, my lord, belonging to the king," replied St. Prix, "in this little cabinet;" and, crossing the hall of the council, he took one out and gave it to the duke, who thanked him graciously, and, still sitting by the fire, fell into a deep fit of thought. Suddenly, however, he turned pale; his eyes assumed the same expression as they had done the night before, when he had fancied he saw a figure in the room with him; and, taking a small silver bonbonnière from his pocket, he opened it, as if seeking for something that it usually contained, saying at the same time, "I feel very faint! My people have neglected everything," he added, "this morning."

Several members of the council gathered round him, and St. Prix, the valet, brought him from the cabinet where the handkerchief had been found, some of the dried plums of Brignolles, which were then held as a restorative. The duke took one of them and ate it, and placed the others in the bonbonnière. After a little his colour returned, and he said, "I am better now. How strange these attacks are, and how fortunate that one never feels them on occasions of battle or danger!"

A moment or two after, he took a turn or two up and

down the room, and seemed perfectly recovered; and as he was about to resume his seat, the door of the passage leading to the king's chamber was opened, and the secretary of state, Revol, entered, saying, "Monsieur, his majesty wishes to speak a word with your highness before the business of the council commences. You will find him in the old cabinet to the left."

Revol was as pale as death. But the Duke of Guise took not the slightest notice; and, passing through the door, which St. Prix held open for him and closed after him, he advanced towards the chamber of the king.

On entering it he saw Laugnac seated upon the coffer at the farther end of the room; and he remarked, with an angry frown, that the king's attendant did not rise when he entered. He said nothing, however, but turned towards the door of the old cabinet, which was too low to suffer him to pass without bowing his head. He accordingly stooped for the purpose; and, raising the tapestry with his left hand, while he held his hat in the right, he passed on.

He had scarcely taken a step into the cabinet, however, when he at once saw several men in arms standing round. At the same moment there was a sound close to him; and, springing from behind the arras, a fierce and powerful man, named St. Malines, rushed upon him.

The duke dropped his hat and moved his hand towards his sword; but at the same moment some one seized the hilt with both hands, and St. Malines struck him a blow with a knife over the left shoulder, burying the weapon in his bosom.

Another and another blow succeeded from the hands of those around him: the blood rushed up into his mouth and throat; but still, with prodigious power, he seized two of those who were assailing him, and dashed them headlong to the ground, exclaiming at the same time, "Ah, traitors!"

Rushing towards the door, he dragged another along with him into the chamber of the king; and seeing Laugnac still there, and marking him as the instigator of his murder, with a brow awful in the struggle of the strong spirit against the power of death, with hands clinched and teeth set, he darted towards him.

Ere he had taken two steps, however, his brain reeled, his eyes lost their sight, and Laugnac, starting up, saw,

by the fearful swimming of those visionless orbs, that the terrible deed was fully accomplished; that the life of Guise was at an end; and though the duke still rushed forward upon him with the convulsive impulse of his last sensation, the captain of the Quarante-cinq did not even unsheath his sword, but merely struck him a light blow with the weapon in the scabbard, and Guise fell head-long on the carpet by the king's bedside.

The sound of that deep heavy fall was enough; and Henry, coming forth from his cabinet, gazed for several minutes earnestly upon the dead man, while the dark blood rushed forth, and formed a pool round the monarch's feet.

The countenance of every one there present, lips and cheek alike, were as white as parchment; and for two or three minutes not a word was spoken, till at length the king exclaimed, "What a height he was! He seems to me taller even dead than living!"

Then setting his foot upon the dead man's neck, he cruelly repeated the cruel words which Guise himself had used at the death of Coligny, "Venomous beast, thou shalt spit forth no more poison!"

CHAPTER XXII.

From the door of the council-chamber the boy Ignati flew back to the apartments of the Duke of Guise, and the tidings which he brought spread confusion and terror through the whole of the duke's domestics: but Ignati was of a clinging and affectionate disposition; and, after the duke his master, his next thoughts turned to Charles of Montsoreau. To his apartments, then, the boy proceeded with all possible speed, having in his hand the note from the Duke of Guise, which he had almost forgotten in the agitation of the late events. He found the young nobleman already dressed, and concluding with his attendants various arrangements for his approaching union with her he loved; a union, indeed, entirely dependant upon the life of him who was at that very moment falling under the blows of assassins.

With the natural hopefulness of youth and of high

courage, Charles of Montsoreau, though still somewhat anxious, had nearly forgotten the apprehensions of the night before. But the terrified countenance of Ignati, and the cut upon the boy's brow from the blow he had received, showed the young count at once that something had gone wrong; and demanding what was the matter, but without waiting for an answer, he opened the billet of the Duke of Guise, and read.

The words which he found there written were as follows:

"I have had many warnings, Logères, which, personally, it does not become me to attend to. However, should these warnings prove to have been justly given, and you see Henry of Guise no more, take your fair bride with you at once; fly to my brother of Mayenne; be united as soon as possible, without waiting for any ceremony but the blessing of the priest; and, to the best of your power, avenge the death of him who was your friend to the last."

"Where is the duke, Ignati?" demanded the young count, eagerly. "Has he yet gone to the council?"

"He is gone! he is gone!" replied the boy, "and he will never return!" And, in a rapid manner, he told him all that had taken place, as far as he himself yet knew it.

"Fly to the apartments of Mademoiselle de Clairvaux instantly," said the count. "Ask if I can speak with her, and give her that note. If she is not in her own apartment, she is in that of the Duchess of Nemours, which is by the side of it. Quick, Ignati; tell her there is not a moment to be lost."

The boy sped away. The count then gave a few rapid orders to Gondrin, bidding him discover if there was any means of issuing forth from the castle; and then turned his steps, as speedily as possible, towards the chamber of Marie de Clairvaux.

In the narrow passage, however, which led towards the apartments of the Duchess of Nemours, he was passed by Pericard, the duke's secretary, who slackened not his pace for an instant, but said, "Fly, sir! fly! The duke is dead!" and rushed on. The next moment Charles met the fair girl herself coming towards him with as swift a pace as his own, and followed by the boy Ignati, who from time to time turned back his head, as

if to see that they were not pursued. Marie was as pale as death.

"Oh, Charles," she said, "I fear we cannot obey my uncle's commands. What has happened to him, I know not; but the guards have just arrested the Duchess de Nemours and my poor cousin Joinville. It is impossible to pass in that direction, and I fear all the gates are guarded."

"Run to the chapel," said the boy. "Run to the chapel by the back staircase and the little corridor behind the duke's room. There will be no one in the chapel in this time of confusion, and there is a way from the chapel into the gardens. The postern may be left unguarded."

"Excellently bethought," replied Charles of Montsoreau. "Speed on, Ignati; speed on before us, and see that there is no one on the watch. If you find Gondrin, send him to the chapel without a moment's delay. We must fly, sweet Marie; we must fly, as your uncle has ordered. It is clear—though it is terrible to say—it is clear that he is dead. They would not have dared to arrest his son and mother had he been living. But we must find you some cloak or covering, sweet girl. You cannot go forth in all this bridal array."

Marie bent down her head and wept; for though she had suffered much within the last few months, it had not been with that withering kind of suffering which dries up the fountain of our tears. She hurried on with her lover, however, and in his apartments a mantle was speedily found to cover the bright and happy attire which she had that morning put on with feelings of hope and joy. In few but distinct words, Charles of Montsoreau told the two servants whom he found there to get out, if possible, by any means into the town, and to bring round the rest of his train and his horses to the farther side of the gardens; and then hurrying on by the way which the boy had suggested, he led Marie de Clairvaut towards the chapel where they were to have been united.

The little corridor which they followed entered at once into a small room, called the revestry, by the side of the chapel itself; and as Charles of Montsoreau approached, he heard voices and paused to listen. He then plainly distinguished the tones of Gondrin and the page; and though another deep voice was also heard,

he hurried on, feeling certain that they would have come to give him warning had there been danger.

The door was partly open, and, throwing it back, the count beheld a scene which made all his blood run cold, while the fair girl whom he was leading forward recoiled in terror and dismay.

Stretched upon the floor, with his sword half drawn from the sheath, and a deep wound in his left breast, lay Gaspar de Montsoreau. A pool of blood surrounded him, and the expression of his whole countenance showed in a moment that the spirit had departed some time. Scattered—some upon the ground, some upon the table in the midst of the room, some even in the midst of the blood itself—were a number of pieces of gold; and two leathern bags, one open and half empty of its contents, were seen upon the ground.

At the farther side of the room, near the door leading into the chapel, was standing Gondrin, with his sword naked, and his foot upon the chest of the Italian Orbi; while the boy Ignati knelt beside the assassin, and with his drawn dagger held over him, seemed putting to him some quick and eager questions.

"I tell you true," answered the man, as Charles of Montsoreau entered: "I tell you true. It was he who set me on and paid me; the Abbé de Boisguerin, and no one else."

The boy sprang up and moved away on the young count's appearance; and a few words from Gondrin explained to him, that, coming from the gardens—where he had found all solitary, the key in the lock of the postern gate, and the way clear—he had heard a low cry from the side of the chapel, and, on entering that room, had discovered the unhappy Marquis de Montsoreau weltering in his blood, and the Italian Orbi gathering up some of the gold pieces, which seemed to have fallen to the ground in a brief struggle between him and the marquis.

During this account, Marie de Clairvaut, pale as death and terribly agitated, supported herself by one of the high-backed chairs, and turned her eyes from the horrible sight which that room exhibited; and Charles of Montsoreau gazed for a moment on the dead form of his brother with those feelings of fraternal love which no unkindness or ill treatment had been able to banish.

Every instant, however, was precious; and, recovering himself as speedily as possible, he turned to Gondrin,

bidding him disarm the Italian, who had still his sword, though the weapon with which he had committed the murder had been dropped beside the dead body.

"Shall I kill him, sir?" said Gondrin, pressing the man down more firmly with his foot, as he found him make a slight effort to escape.

"Oh, in pity, in pity, Charles," cried Marie, clasping her hands towards him, "do not, do not!"

"No, no!" replied Charles of Montsoreau; "cut that rope from the window, Ignati. Bind him hand and foot, Gondrin, and leave him to the justice of those who come after."

It was done in a moment; and Charles of Montsoreau only pausing once more for a moment to gaze on his brother's corpse, exclaimed with sincere sorrow, "Alas, poor Gaspar!" and then, with a quick step, led Marie de Clairvaut from that terrible chamber into the gardens and towards the postern gate.

All was clear, and Charles of Montsoreau turned the key and threw the gate back. The moment that it was opened, two men darted forward from the other side, as if to seize the person coming out, and in one of them, though entirely changed in dress and appearance, Charles instantly recognised the Abbé de Boisguerin, who, before he saw that any one had accompanied Mademoiselle de Clairvaut, had caught her violently by the arm.

The memory of a thousand wrongs flashed upon the young count's mind in a moment; his sword sprung from the sheath, glittered for a single instant in the air, and then passed through the body of the base man before him, piercing him from side to side.

The abbé uttered a shrill and piercing cry, and, when the count withdrew his weapon, fell instantly back upon the ground, quivering in the agonies of death. The other man who had stood beside the abbé fled amain; but on the road, about fifty yards from the garden wall, stood a carriage, with six horses and their drivers, with a group of some nine or ten men on horseback.

On the abbé's first cry the horsemen began to ride towards the spot; but the appearance of Gondrin coming through the low door behind the count, and then the page, made them pause, hesitate, and seem to consult. In another moment or two the sound of horses coming from the side of the town caused them to withdraw still farther from the spot: and with joy that is scarce-

ly to be expressed, Charles of Montsoreau saw his own colours in the scarfs of the horsemen that approached. In a moment after he was surrounded by at least twenty of his own armed attendants; led horses, too, were there in plenty; and he now whispered words of hope that he really felt to Marie de Clairvaut, who clung almost fainting to his arm.

"Stop the carriage, Gondrin!" he exclaimed, seeing the drivers in the act of mounting, as if to hasten away after the horsemen, who, on their part, had taken flight at the first sight of the young count's followers. "We must make use of it, whether they will or not; but promise them large rewards. There is a mystery here I do not understand; but it is evidently some new villainy. Come, dear Marie, come; we must not pause." And, leading her forward to the carriage, he spoke to the drivers himself.

One of them was the master of the horses which the abbé had hired, and he was found not at all unwilling to enter into any arrangement that the count chose to propose. Marie de Clairvaut was placed in the carriage, the horsemen surrounded it, and Charles himself was about to mount his horse, when he perceived that the boy Ignati had not followed him, but remained kneeling by the side of the Abbé de Boisguerin. Turning quickly back, to his utter surprise he found the youth weeping bitterly; and when he urged him to rise and come with the carriage, Ignati shook his head, saying, "No, no! I cannot leave him like dead carrion for the hawks and ravens. He was my father! Go on, my lord count, and God speed you! I must see him buried, and masses said for his soul!"

The count was moved, but he could not remain; and giving the boy some money, he said, "Spend that upon his funeral, Ignati, and then follow me with all speed to Lyons. I grieve for you, my boy, though I understand not how this can be."

Only one more difficulty existed, which was, to pass through that part of the town leading to the bridge over the Loire. But the servants who had made their escape from the castle, and brought round their fellows to his assistance, assured the count that the news of the Duke of Guise's murder had already spread through the city, and that everything was in such a state of confusion and dismay, he might pass with the greatest security.

Such he found to be the case; all the guard of the king was within the walls of the chateau; the gates of the bridges, and of the town itself, were in the hands of the faction of the League; and no questions were asked of one who was known to have been the dear and intimate friend of the murdered duke.

Taking his way through a part of the country devoted to the League, Charles of Montsoreau and his fair companion found no difficulty in reaching Lyons, where the history of all that had taken place was soon told to the Duke of Mayenne, and the last lines which the hand of Henry of Guise ever traced were shown to him, who was destined thenceforth to be the great head of the League.

Had the words and the wishes of his brother not been sufficient for Mayenne, the necessity of binding to his cause for ever one whose aid was so important as that of Charles of Montsoreau, would have been enough to decide the duke's conduct towards him: and as soon as possible after all the anguish, difficulty, and danger which they had undergone together, the fate of the young Count of Logères and Marie de Clairvaut was united for ever.

In regard to them, it need only be said that they loved each other to the last hours of life.

The boy Ignati followed the young count to Lyons, but he would not remain with the man who had taken his father's life. He subsequently devoted himself to the church, and in the end rose high, by the great interest that was exercised on his behalf.

The wars of the League succeeded: but the feelings of Charles of Montsoreau were greatly changed by the death of the Duke of Guise; and though he waged war, as zealously as anybody could possibly do, against the murderer of his lost friend, yet, when Henry III. himself fell under the blow of an assassin, the young Count of Logères would no longer contend against a monarch so generous, so noble, and so chivalrous as the king who next ascended the throne.

He sheathed the sword, then, after the accession of Henri Quatre, and the rest of his days passed in peace and calm retirement, in the society of her whom he loved ever, and loved alone.



